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## Some Thoughts on Narrative

Ursula K. Le Guin

*This paper incorporates parts of the Nina Mae Kellogg Lecture given at Portland State University in the spring of 1980.*

Recently, at a three-day-long symposium on narrative, I learned that it's unsafe to say anything much about narrative, because if a poststructuralist doesn't get you a deconstructionist will. This is a pity, because the subject is an interesting one to those outside the armed camps of literary theory. As one who spends a good deal of her time telling stories, I should like to know, in the first place, why I tell stories, and in the second place, why you listen to them; and vice versa.

Through long practice I know how to tell a story, but I'm not sure I know what a story is, and I have not found much patience with the question among those better qualified to answer it. To literary theorists it is evidently too primitive, to linguists it is not primitive enough; and among psychologists I know of only one, Simon Lesser, who has tried seriously to explain narration as a psychic process. There is, however, always Aristotle.

Aristotle says that the essential element of drama and epic is "the arrangement of the incidents." And he goes on to make the famous and enduring comment that this narrative or plot element consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end:

A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end, that which is naturally after something else, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it.

According to Aristotle, then, narrative connects events, "arranges incidents," in a directional temporal order analogous to a directional spatial order. Causality is implied but not exactly stated (in the word "consequent," which could mean "result" or merely "what follows"); the principal linkage as I understand it is temporal (cf. M. Foster's story sequence, "and then . . . and then . . . and then . . ."). So narrative is language used to connect events in time. The connection, whether conceived as a closed pattern, beginning-middle-end, or an open one, past-present-future, whether seen as linear or spiral or recursive, involved a movement "through" time for which spatial metaphor is adequate. Narrative makes a journey. It goes from A to Z, from then to then-prime.

This might be why narrative does not normally use the present tense except for special effect or out of affectation. It locates itself in the past (whether the real or an imagined, fictional past) in order to allow itself forward movement. The present not only competes against the story with a vastly superior weight of reality, but limits it to the pace of watch hand or heartbeat. Only by locating itself in the "other country" of the past is the narrative free to move towards its future, the present.

The present tense, which some writers of narrative fiction currently employ because it is supposed to make the telling "more actual,"

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William M. Schuyler on Gwyneth Jones  
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and, indeed, yet more

## Unquenchable Fire by Rachel Pollack

Century Fantasy & SF; July 88; £11.95 UK only; 390 pp.

Reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

In the winter issue of 1984, a story appeared in *Interzone*, the UK's highly respected sf magazine. It was called *The Malignant One* and it simply described a woman setting out for a job interview. It wasn't exactly earth shattering but there was something mesmeric, for this reader at least, about the way the world of the story twisted and realigned the commonplace details of everyday life. What the woman did was exactly what anyone might do in our world. She tried to wear her lucky clothes, she wondered whether her last night's dream "meant" success or failure; she read oracles into her breakfast and the faces of the people at the bus stop. It was all so very familiar—and yet, and yet . . . Besides the other kinks in reality, this story appeared to be set in some kind of Utopia; but a struggling Utopia, a magical promised land that had failed to deliver on those promises. Rachel Pollack, resident of Amsterdam for the past fifteen years but a native of New York State, is a world-acknowledged authority on the Tarot; her works if fiction are rare but well worth waiting for. Now at last, after the tantalizing glimpses here comes a whole world, which just exactly the world we live in but marvelously, meticulously transformed: *re-formed*.

*Unquenchable Fire* is (on the face of it) set in a future America, some eighty-seven years after a catastrophic but basically benign revolution: an America in which the laws of magic have taken over from the laws of physics, and the rises of animism have invaded the rites of consumerism. Its story is the story of Jennifer Mazdan (Courageous Wisdom), respectable single woman and resident of the small city of Poughkeepsie, who has a job tending the city's energy guardians (that is, a rather dull and low paid post in local government). Jennifer has a dream, "one found in any of the catalogues," and finds herself the victim of a miraculous conception. The rest of the plot deals with how she, her mother, her ex-husband, her neighbors react to this visitation: how Jennifer tries to rid herself of the pregnancy and the various kinds of

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# FOXFIELD

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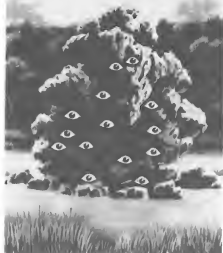
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## STILL FORMS ON FOXFIELD

JOAN SLONCZEWSKI

Campbell Memorial Award-winning  
author of *A Door into Ocean*



supernatural persuasion applied to induce her to go through with it. There's really very little to it, no twists and turns. As is often the case with a novel set in a richly imagined world the world itself is the point of the book, the story a slight framework on which the arresting image, the iconic Picture we are to look at, is displayed.

*Unquenchable Fire* is a fantasy, which means that it can afford to be more candid about its relationship with the present day than the kind of story that's technically known as science fiction. Forget about the eighty seven years, this is America through the looking glass—delis, Woolworths, shopping malls, tract housing, silly parades, sillier television. Rachel Pollack's wry and meticulous mapping of an America she knows and loves to the same place run on ceremonial magic is a real *tour de force*, full of wicked wit. There are hilarious snippets of housewives' coffee morning chat—the extraordinary things people get up to to make their lawns grow in Magic America, the awful one-up-womanism of whose sacred offerings to domestic totems work best and why. Yet the most striking thing about this weird world is how little Pollack had to change: only the names. The unconscious rituals and animism of the fervent consumer slide with wondrous ease into the new mold. What are the advertisers of deodorants and insurance selling if not reassurance; protection...? And still there's an Utopia. The drastic revaluing of those beliefs and assumptions we call "superstition" (but cannot do without) has recreated a tribal, numinous relationship between the people of this America and each other; and "The Living World"—and all without sacrificing so much as a toaster in the way of consumerist conveniences. Indeed one of the few weak moments in the book comes when Jennifer looks around her ordinary living room and tries to imagine what she would have seen in the old days, when the world was a mass of lifeless objects and people "were as empty as old forgotten dresses hanging in a closet." There is no chance for Jennifer to see, outside of a few odd little figurines (the New America version of shrunken heads hanging from the roof tree). What has happened is a shift in emphasis, in perception. And the fact that the bizarre marvels of this world—when they do appear—are more or less random; that

magical ceremonies are effective but never the way you expect, only goes to make the place more convincing.

Jennifer's story is interrupted by many others, some of them very strange and all of them beautiful, but strangest of all is the narrative that is Li Ku's story. Li Ku (*Unquenchable Fire*) a lawyer of Chinese extraction, was one of the magically possessed revolutionaries who destroyed the old world and founded this new age. This is the koan she offered to the children of the revolution: they didn't understand it and they didn't like it. It's a tale less comfortable than "miraculous conception," but just as hauntingly familiar.

They set sail, assuring each other that the Sea of Sorrows guarded the entrance to some lost paradise, a place where food of all cuisines fell into your mouth the moment you tilted back your head, where every few years you could clean, sparkle and even reshape your body, like bringing your clothes to the laundry. Carrying their seeds and saplings and cows and pigs... followed by rats and flies and cockroaches, they crossed the great water, their eyes painted over with images of palaces and winged children, their noses stuffed with flowers...

Li Ku's story seems to be, in part, a kind of alternative history of the USA. But as it continues it turns into a list of horrors, a terrible catalogue of wrongs done in the name of right, of genocide and exploitation and hypocrisy; of torture and sickness and every kind of misery. Meanwhile, it has been evident from the start that the magical revolution of Jennifer's world is faltering: the people have lost their way, their ceremonies of life are becoming empty; the rituals meaningless. Li Ku's name—and names are very important in this book—can be found in the Book of Changes (naturally, Chinese magic is as valid as any other in Jennifer's country: Chinese, Cabalistic, Amerindian, whatever you like. This is still America, the Great Big Melting Pot). The hexagram "Xu" means decay: it is also known as "Work Upon What Has Been Spoiled."

## The New York Review of Science Fiction

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Kathryn Cramer, Features Editor; L. W. Curry, Contributing Editor; Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor; David G. Hartwell, Reviews Editor; Susan Palwick, Short Fiction Editor.

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One way of looking at Rachel Pollack's novel is to see it as one more proof of the truism that the story of Utopia cannot be written. The nearest you can get is to describe the journey but stop at the gates; or chest and have things going wrong in heaven. But there is actually something more happening here. The other half of the eponymous Founder's name is "Li," the clinging fire. It becomes clear that the lesson Li Ku, turning forever in glory and agony on her wheel of flame, was trying to teach is the lesson of this book: and it is not just another call to repentance. After the Revolution, when we're all returned in to harmony with the Living World, what do you do about human suffering? It ought to vanish—but suppose it doesn't? Maybe in order to make and keep a perfect world one of the things we have to do is to acknowledge, to celebrate, to find some valid meaning for the reality we now call pain. Ursula K. Le Guin once wrote a story called *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*, a story in which—creator of Utopias herself—she faced this very problem. The people of Omelas lived perfectly in beauty and truth, nothing ever harmed them. But they had

a strange coming-of-age ceremony. A young adult would be taken by her elders and shown into a secret, dirty cellar, in which a single child squatted in naked, animal misery. The young person would be told—this child is the price we pay. You can't free the child, that's impossible. But you ought to know that on the acceptance of this misery depends not only your happiness and beauty, but the existence of our whole lovely world. Le Guin said that occasionally, just occasionally, there would be someone who would leave that cellar and keep walking; who would walk away from paradise. That's one solution, take it or leave it. Pollack seems to be offering another just as strange and perhaps even more terrible: but finally maybe more satisfying, more complete than any other fantasist has yet offered to the most obstinate problem of Utopian writing.

And even if the koan doesn't work for you, you should still buy this book as soon as you can. Because it is really very funny. ▶

Guy Meth Jones's books include *Escape Plans* and *Divine Endurance*.

### M31: A Family Romance by Stephen Wright

New York: Harmony Books, 1988; \$17.95 hc; 214 pp.

reviewed by Gordon Van Gelder



*Definition: alien adj 1a. belonging or relating to another person, place or thing; strange 2. differing in nature or character typically to the point of incompatibility (from Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary)*

In science fiction, the alien is traditionally the outsider, the stranger, the other, the invader who brings a new and different way into contact with our own. Such is the nature of first contact stories; the first contact is contact with something new. But in *M31* Stephen Wright peers through the other end of the telescope to discover that the aliens aren't out there, in some distant land or far-off planet, they're right here in middle America. And they're strange.

Take Dash, the head of the household. A renowned UFO observer, he believes Earth is not his home; he and his family come from Eberia, off in the spiral galaxy known as M31. His wife is Dot. Their household, occupied by the children, Dallas, Edsel, Mignon (males) Trinity, Maryse, (females) and Zoe (arguably female) is very bizarre. It was once a church, but now is a mecca for witnesses to UFO phenomena. Edsel—roughly twelve in Earth years—watches the green radar screen for signs of the mother ship. A goat named Poly roams the yard and the cemetery out back. Photos of UFOs decorate the walls—some of them are originals. Maryse and her baby Mignon live entirely off a liquid known as Weighless. Incest makes it hard to define all relationships within the family. In the middle of the floor rests a hollow capsule made of piecemeal metals. The Object. There is an orange cat named Minerva. The household is strange.

The basic plot is simple: strangers Beale and Gwen ("she's a five-time contactor") arrive on the scene, though in this case the scene is stranger than the strangers. The newcomers upset the order of the household, set off events that require the family ("The Unit") to up and leave. This book is about the search for Home, the quest for contentedness, and I won't reveal whether they look or whether the Mother ship gathers them into her ever-loving bosom.

I will reveal, however, the nature of the book: it is wonderful. Wright does a great job of portraying all the members of The Unit, creating an alien family as weird as any of John Irving's (a connection I draw deliberately: Wright studied writing with Irving at Iowa, and the influence is obvious); and yet he allows us to relate to the characters, to understand them, to share in their alienness. For we are all alien, for we are all alone within our self-contained Units (our selves), and yet *M31* suggests through its sympathetic portrayal of beings who believe they are not of this world that there is something universally "human," something we share in Dash's paranoid fantasies (or are they?) and in Dallas's beer gazing and in Zoe's incomprehensible screaming fits.

Wright's prose allows us to see everyday objects in an alien light—leaves on a tree resemble magician's cards and peanut butter becomes something I don't dare mention. Occasionally he tries too hard to make

life on earth appear new and different, most particularly when he attempts to describe *The Addams Family* sitcom with the same disconcerting style as he describes the rest of the world:

A dapper mustachioed man in a smoking jacket was declaiming in a broad theatrical manner. A thin long-haired woman stood listening before him, her evening gown too tight to accommodate sitting. A pair of strange-looking children ran up out of the basement. A monster perched on a bench playing a harpsichord. A disembodied hand emerged from a box with the day's mail. Lines of dialogue were shunted in and out between crashes of mirth from the laugh track. (p. 45)

By serving within this fictional world an already-familiar fictional world whose odd nature we take for granted, and by trying to make it appear as alien as the rest of life on Earth, Wright takes us out of the world of *M31* instead of drawing us further into it. Likewise, during an excellent scene wherein Dash takes the newcomers and The Unit out stargazing (through binoculars mounted on a tripod), and the children decide the moon-watching they prefer focuses on the Earth-bound objects they can see through neighbors' windows, Dallas comments once too often that "This is like looking for life on Pluto" (p. 78). But on the whole, the writing is original and cliché-free (and often very funny) without drawing excessive attention to itself—a too-rare occurrence.

Perhaps most importantly, Wright handles the UFOlogy very knowledgeably and even-handedly, alluding to Wilhelm Reich and to important sightings, showing Dash both as he muses upon the nature of Eberia and as he remembers the two thousand bucks he made at a good conference. By balancing sides so well—Edsel genuinely annoyed when his brother tells him that blip on the screen is just a storm and Edsel telling the outsider Gwen his fantasy "They're not my real parents"—and especially by never letting his narrative voice cast judgment, Wright treats UFO phenomena splendidly. He neither belittles nor inflates the belief in extraterrestrial life; he creates credible characters to whom the phenomena mean different things and then he leaves it to the reader to decide if indeed we (or they) are not of this planet.

So now I believe that the aliens are here, captured between covers by ink; in fact, I believe we're seeing them portrayed in art as being of our own kind because our leaders (in government) feel so distant and different from ourselves. Wright's middle-American aliens are not so much an innovative idea as they are a beautifully-drawn and sympathetic set of characters; we actually like them; as opposed to the distorted monsters that form our collective family in much of contemporary fiction (especially horror fiction). And I believe we'll be reading *M31* for a long time; it's alien, it's human, and it's great. ▶

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by Gregory Benford:

*On Strike Against God*, Joanna Russ, The Crossing Press. All that Russ style invested in a witty lesbian feminist novel.

*A Physicist's Guide to Skepticism*, Milton Rothman, Prometheus. A sharp-eyed look at all those sf ideas by an oldtime fan.

*The Mask of Command*, John Keegan, Viking. A deep look at the changing historical reality of military leadership. Must reading for writers and fans of technoempire sf.

*Rock Springs*, Richard Ford, Vintage. Useful antidote to the endless sf stories about winners.

*The Gold Coast*, Kim Stanley Robinson, Tor. Best near future novel in quite a while.

The radical left tends to reject the usual solution of merely failing to mention the characteristic of race, in favor of using phrases like "Women of Color."

—Political movements (that one is sympathetic to) and other groups are allowed to be self-labeling. Allowing people to be self-labeling is not necessarily consistent with other politically correct restrictions. I recall, in a conversation with another woman, calling a mutual acquaintance a "sorority girl." The woman scolded me for using sexist language, to which I responded (with a twinkle in my eye) that because the woman in question referred to herself as a girl, I was merely allowing her to be self-labeling.

People working to keep abortion legal are "pro-choice" rather than "pro-abortion," for example. While I personally use the term "pro-choice," and while I know the reasoning which causes that movement to want to be known by the one name rather than the other, there is as big a lie hiding in that label as there is in the opposition's label, "pro-life." Both sides are very narrowly focused on one particular issue, to which the arguments regarding a woman's choice and a fetus's life are subordinate.

The attempt to push words like "choice" or "life" ahead of words like "abortion" in this context is an attempt to deceive the unwary. And this is true of a significant portion of the linguistic restrictions on politically correct speech among the radical left.

The result is that rather than promoting introspection and deep political analysis, which then causes the individual to decide to take drastic action, this subculture promotes the use of pat phrases which invoke the deep thinking that someone else did, thereby making it easier for everyone to agree as often as possible. If personal revelations were allowed and encouraged, there would never be the kind of coherent mass action which gives the impression of a movement.

### 2. "Intelligent" Conservatives:

I've put the quotation marks around "intelligent" not as an intended insult, but rather because intelligence is an essential part of the image, whether or not the individual in question is particularly intelligent. These people are tremendously concerned with "educating" the public about all the intricacies of weapons systems, most often to the end of explaining why we can't get rid of it all just now.

There is a real information snobbery involved in this outlook. By learning lots of military acronyms, they delude themselves and others into thinking that they know what they are talking about. I would be much more in sympathy with this strategy for solving the problem of nuclear weapons were not whole continents of necessary information highly classified military secrets to which most of these people have no access.

It is hard enough to be knowledgeable about a subject for which the relevant information is in the New York Public Library. In the case of a subject where much of the most sensitive information is unavailable (or, if you have the security clearance, undiscussable), it is a dangerous act of vanity to believe that you are well-informed; to attempt to convince other people that you know what you are talking about is to lie.

### 3. The Undecided

These are the activists who remain neutral because they feel that the issue is too important to have a publicly held position on; rather, we should all engage in immediate dialogue on the matter—with the Soviet Union, with the local Rotary Club, with the State Legislature, with our grandmothers.

What one sacrifices by taking this stance is the moral right to have an opinion. This requires that one suppress one's ability to come to conclusions. While neutrality, on a theoretical level, is an admirable stance, the emotional sacrifice involved in this is a large and stupid one. In general, the effect of their behavior is that they seem to try to make other people surrender the right to come to conclusions, just as they have. This is not merely conservation of thought. It is the active dismantling of it.

On the high end, there are shining examples of intelligent, articulate people of all three types who have resisted many of the guilty pleasures of politics. On the low end, say, at the level of the leadership of a "nuclear awareness" organization at a state university, there are people who follow exactly the patterns of Pushbutton Politics and degrade anyone unfortunate enough to listen. Unfortunately, the latter

day after the last piece of orbiting Star Wars paraphernalia splashes down in the Indian Ocean or crushes a farmhouse in the Australian outback? I don't know the answer to that question, and I don't think that I want to know.

Although Star Wars is a joke, I don't think it's a very funny one. It's about as funny as pulling a chair out from under someone who's in the process of sitting down.

If there is a real solution to the problems posed by nuclear weapons, it definitely involves getting rid of all of those bombs. What is a species to do?

### Sincerity Vectors II: Activists

As if that problem weren't complicated enough, if you were an activist, the practical problem you would face once you felt you had answered that question would be how you (working by yourself, with your friends, or with your organization) can get the rest of us to do what needs to be done. These two questions: "What should we do?" and "How do I get us to do it?" are the most fundamental questions faced by the political activist.

The activist necessarily lives in an egocentric universe because success or failure is measured by how quickly and how well other people do what the activist thinks is right. But it is the mass aspect to contemporary politics that makes the conservation of thought an essential part of this process. One does not tactfully point out or gently suggest something to three and a half million people. (These conversational modes can only take place in discussions among small groups.) A more effective tactic is to wear them down with repetition. While it is possible for great art to get through to large numbers of people very quickly, repetition does so much more reliably.

Recently at least, there tend to be three basic strains of person involved in the nuclear issue:

#### 1. Peace Activists

The (usually) radical left or religious peace activist tends to call for things like unilateral disarmament. This is the strain one tends to find in Women's Peace Camps or committing acts of civil disobedience, for example. They tend to be very self-sacrificing, with all that that implies. For each significant adherence to mainstream values that they reject, they seem to adopt a corresponding restriction. (This observation is not limited to peace activists. Rather, it seems to me to be true of much of the self-sacrificing radical left.) Vegetarianism is a very common one, but there are whole forests of possible self-restriction for reasons of political conviction.

The result is a subculture which—although it appears very tolerant and informal from the outside—has an enormously complex and strict etiquette, complete with naughty words that you don't use.

—Don't use the word "man," unless you mean a male person. The whole package of sexist language is taboo: chairman, postman, etc.—no construction is too awkward if it allows one to avoid sexist language.

—Most racist language has become taboo in mainstream culture.

variety outnumber the former as surely as mediocre violinists outnumber good ones. Each of the three positions has moral arguments to recommend it, and none is inherently superior, although my sympathies lie with the peace activists, because if you are going to work on an issue, you should work on that issue, not just find new ways to talk about working on it.

All three behavior patterns promote the conservation of thought. Ultimately though, on an issue that can involve extinction if we screw up, we cannot afford to conserve thought.

#### *This Is the Way the Book Ends*

What I think Morrow left out of *This Is the Way the World Ends* is a real exploration of the ways in which people who work very hard on the nuclear arms issue can also help to bring us closer to nuclear war. The only such characters in the book are among the unadmitted, who certainly can't be held responsible because they were never born.

This is a significant omission because, while Morrow refuses to absolve the hero who merely let things happen without paying much attention, he implicitly absolves anyone who ever wore a Ban the Bomb button, anyone who ever attended a meeting of "Students for Nuclear Awareness," anyone who ever phoned into his or her local radio talk show to say that he or she thought that nuclear war was bad, never mind all the people who live on three hundred dollars a month and spend all their time doing mailings and organizing demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience. He may absolve them, but I don't.

This omission displays a kind of nervousness on the part of the author (as though he were afraid of accidental self-condemnation) that was unnecessary. While the book itself is counter to meme-oriented

books on the nuclear issue, the author carefully looks away from the same traits in political activists. Since from a certain way of looking at things, any attempts to avoid nuclear war, no matter how ill-conceived, are better than none at all, I suppose that he might have been trying to avoid discouraging people from engaging in political action.

But I just can't agree that any action is better than none at all, particularly when a person has more than just those two choices, and even more particularly when "none" is not among the possible choices.

As Morrow quite rightly points out, any action can be political and its meaning is not dependent upon one's intent. George Paxton, the "naïve skeptic" is guilty of complicity whether he wants to believe it or not. One cannot choose to be entirely uninvolved with the outcome of a political situation of sufficient scope.

While aesthetically, *This Is the Way the World Ends* upholds a higher standard of behavior than mere organizational politics, a more simplistic interpretation of the book yields a simple political call to action—any action.

In the current political context, conservation of thought can be every bit as dangerous as the weapons themselves. The NRA actually has something interesting to say on this point. In its usual usage, I find their slogan "Guns don't kill people. People kill people," to be politically reprehensible, but what truth is contained in the slogan applies here. Nuclear weapons can kill people, but if they do, they won't have done it alone. Getting rid of the weapons will not be enough to save us from extinction. Rigorous thought got us into this, and it is the only thing that can get us out again.

The book itself demands that its readers think, but its moral allows them to demand less of themselves. And that's too bad. Sincerity is not enough. ▴

### **The Further Adventures of Slugger McBall: Baseball Stories**

by W. P. Kinsella

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988  
reviewed by Richard A. Lupoff

The thing is, here is a major contemporary fantasy fiction writer (he does a little science fiction, too, but not to quibble). And he's taken seriously by bigtime publications and high-tone critics and his most successful novel, at least, is required reading in lit courses at hundreds of colleges. But most fantasy fans have never heard of him, and most critics and professors who think he's hot stuff don't realize that he's a fantasy author.

And Kinsella himself doesn't think of himself as a fantasy author. Last spring he visited my town and we taped a radio show together and I asked him about this, and he said that when he started writing he knew the works of Ray Bradbury and admired them, but that was about the only science fiction or fantasy he'd ever read. Heard of Tolkien and all that gang, but not quite his cup of soup.

So you tell Kinsella he's a fantasy writer and he smiles thinly. It's kind of like the fellow who learned to his delight that he'd been writing *prose* all his life.

As for those professors who make his fantasy novel *Shoeless Joe* required reading ... they teach courses in something called "Sports Literature." Which makes me realize that the people who said that when the academics had wrong SF out for all it was worth, they'd find something else to go on to, were right.

Kinsella started out as a short story writer, dealing mainly with contemporary Native American themes. Books like *Dance Me Outside*, *Scars*, *Born Indian*. He did a short fantasy called "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa," a ghost story about the famous (and tragic) Chicago outfielder whose career was ended by the notorious Black Sox Scandal of 1919. An editor at Houghton Mifflin read the story, contacted Kinsella, asked him if he would consider writing a full-length novel on the same theme, and the rest was history. Make it your business to read *Shoeless Joe*.

The newest collection from Kinsella contains ten short stories, some of them previously published in such periodicals as *The Seattle Review*, *Arise: Journal of Sports Literature*, *Spillball: The Literary Baseball Magazine*, and *Canadian Fiction Magazine*.

Hardly *Amazing Stories* or *F&SF*, I'll admit. But at least one of the stories is pure—quill science fiction, and two or three of the others are definitely or arguably fantasies.

The SF story, now. It's called "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated," and it's one that the late Walter Tevis could have claimed with pride. In fact, in both theme and mood it reminds me of Tevis's novel, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, although certainly with no suggestion of derivation. I don't want to tell you too much about this one, but let me ask those of you who follow both science fiction and bigtime sports if you're sure the San Diego Chicken of the Arkansas Razorback or the former, short-lived San Francisco Crab, is really just a hired hand in a silly getup.

The story is funny, poignant, and memorable.

Most of the stories in this book are all three. Some of them are very sad. All of them are right on, when it comes to baseball. By gosh, Kinsella knows his baseball! Debbie Notkin asked me once why I thought the best sports fiction was baseball fiction, and I said, "Because baseball is the best game."

It is!

Let me revert to that radio interview last spring. My partner and producer at KPFA, Richard Wolinsky, is a real baseball fanatic. I love the game and have followed the present Oakland Athletics ever since they were the Philadelphia Athletics. But Wolinsky knows every player on every team, can spout statistics and standings at the drop of a hat, and loves to engage my son Tom, another baseball fanatic, in what could pass to many an auditor as a Talmudic debate.

Anyway, Wolinsky asks Kinsella who's going to come out on top in the 1988 race. "The Mets," says Kinsella. "Barring a series of catastrophic injuries, and I hate to say this, there's no stopping them and there's no question about it: the Mets are going all the way."

I think one of the great things about baseball is that the wrong team in sometimes the right team. ▴

Richard A. Lupoff is a science fiction writer, reviewer, and fan.

Kathryn Cramer  
**Sincerity and Doom:**

**An Eventual Review of James Morrow's *This Is the Way the World Ends***

(New York: Henry Holt, 1986; out of print, but Ace pb forthcoming in May, 1989)

Part 4 of 4

*Sincerity Vectors I: SDI*



The real achievement of *This Is the Way the World Ends* is that it is a political novel which demands thought. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Morrow's outlook, he refuses to hand out slogans which would allow the reader to agree unthinkingly with him; he refuses to participate in the political process as a mere propagator of the political meme.

Mass media and mass production (particularly involving offset presses and the Xerox machine) have allowed politics-as-meme-propagation—Pushbutton Politics—to flourish. Political labels and the faithful replication of political rhetoric have been made much more important than political thought. Not because the people involved are selfish. But rather, because they are too self-sacrificing. Compromising their own intelligence and integrity are just some of the sacrifices that become necessary in the pursuit of the greater good—this is a kind of perverted sainthood.

Inasmuch as political activists give, they must also take. And they know that they are giving a lot—their potential to earn a real living, their free time, their sleep. Politics can hurt your grades, can break up your marriage, and it can just plain burn you out. Their own intelligence and integrity are sometimes the least of their sacrifices. Therefore yours are fair game should you become a consumer of consumer-oriented politics. In this economic struggle for organizational existence, thought is the very first thing to be circumvented. This is not merely a terrible thing. It's dangerous.

The game of Pushbutton Politics, as I've sketched it, is neither utopian nor dystopian. Rather, it is what anyone who puts serious effort into politics can expect to go through. I have deliberately neglected to mention my most inflammatory and unpleasant stories about politics.

Pushbutton Politics offers to American political thought what package offers to science fiction: a commodity which gives all the right signals without any of the qualities which make the whole endeavor worthwhile.

What are the important political issues? And what can we do about them? Is the nuclear arms race an important issue? Is abortion? Is it important which of the various candidates becomes the next president of the United States? Which is the most important? If you were to drop everything and spend the next year working on one of these issues, on which one would you choose to work? How would you work on it? What good would that do? Does it matter whether or not it did any good so long as you tried?

The issue of whether or not your efforts would do any good is a very real one. If you take what you are doing seriously and if you think that your success or failure is a matter of survival, then, if, after all that, you seem to be getting nowhere, political activity can eat you alive because the sacrifices you make can never be enough. The mode of analysis that led you down this path of self-sacrifice leads you also to the conclusion that giving up or remaining passive in the face of evil is admitting complicity with evil—translation: if you quit politics, then you will become the evil you were previously fighting. You can walk away from the battlefield, but you can't leave the war. Continued self-sacrifice seems the only moral course.

Does it matter so long as you tried? This is a serious question because it matters whether you are politically active because you truly want to prevent the evil from happening, or merely because you wish to avoid the feeling of complicity.

If allowed to ignore the matter of whether my political efforts would do any good (and I have little faith that they ever have on this issue, or ever will), I suppose I would grudgingly have to admit that I think the nuclear arms race is the single most important political issue today since one of its possible outcomes is extinction of all life on Earth.

Why grudgingly? Because I dislike the kind of people the issue attracts, and I dislike the technical discussions of weapons systems even more than I dislike the people with whom I would end up discussing. Misguided sincerity abounds. I would rather spend my time thinking about something else; perhaps about an issue less poisoned with insipidity, and an issue that lends itself to at least the illusion of comprehensibility.

I am reluctant to take strong stands on the specifics of nuclear disarmament because I don't feel confident that I really understand the issues. If pressed, I could convince myself that I did understand—probably by immersing myself in the technical literature of weapons systems, I know a certain amount about them now, but not a lot—but if I spent vast amounts of my time researching the technology I would, after a while, get the illusion of knowing more about the arms race than I do.

What I do know is that the situation is very unstable and so long as there are nuclear weapons, it will remain unstable (although to varying degrees depending on the moment by moment situation.) I also know that if all nations pledged to have their weapons systems entirely dismantled by, say, July 14th of this year, for a short while the conditions would be even more unstable. The countries that have nuclear weapons have so thoroughly integrated the threat that they imply into the system of negotiations, treaties, and other aspects of international political economy that these countries can no more afford to throw down their weapons than publishers can decide, overnight, to do only "real" books. The immediate outcome is unpredictable, but almost certainly bad.

The Star Wars defense system is, to me at least, a joke. It invites the US and the Soviet Union (and whoever else can afford one of these astonishingly expensive systems) to proceed with treaties, negotiations, etc. exactly as they have since the beginning of the nuclear arms race—while declaring this immediate problem solved. I'm told that few people actually in our government (including the Reagan administration) actually think that implementing SDI is a good or workable idea. However, this—it seems to me—is not the case in the science fiction field. Assuming that the system actually can be built, a fact of which I am not convinced, I foresee three possible punchlines:

**Punchline #1:**

By the same logic that I can believe that the Star Wars Defense System can be made to function, I can also believe that five or ten or fifteen years after all this expensive hardware is installed in the sky, someone will invent a really cheap way around it; if the SDI system, say, uses laser beams to keep the missiles from their intended course, someone will invent a reflective coating for missiles—all that hardware made obsolete by a few thousand cans of silver paint!

**Punchline #2:**

Assuming the system works and no one finds a cheap, clever way around it, the US and the USSR would each have their Star Wars equipment. But no one else would, because the whole mess would be too expensive. After maybe a hundred years or so of political stalemate, the governments of the two superpowers would realize that while they couldn't push each other around anymore, the two countries together could rule the world with an iron (or a plutonium?) fist. The outcome would be fascism or perhaps something much worse.

**Punchline #3:**

The Star Wars solution is very sensitive to economic collapse. While it probably won't cost nearly as much, year by year, to maintain the system as it will to build it, the cost will still be very high. If one side or the other underwent an economic depression for any length of time, the frequency of maintenance would go way down. What happens the



## Some Thoughts on Narrative

*Continued from page 1*

actually distances the story (and some very sophisticated writers of narrative fiction use it for that purpose). The present tense takes the story out of time. Anthropological reports concerning people who died decades ago, whose societies no longer exist, are written in the present tense; this paper is written in the present tense. Physics is normally written in the present tense, in part because it generalizes, as I am doing now, but also because it deals so much with nondirectional time.

Time for a physicist is quite likely to be reversible. It doesn't matter whether you read an equation forwards or backwards—unlike a sentence. On the subatomic level directionality is altogether lost. You cannot write the history of a photon; narrative is irrelevant, all you can say of it is that it might be, or, otherwise stated, if you can say where it is you can't say when and if you can say when it is you can't say where.

Even of an entity relatively so immense and biologically so complex as a gene, the little packet of instructions that tells us what to be, there is no story to be told; because the gene, barring accident, is immortal. All you can say of it is that it is, and it is, and it is. No beginning, no end. All middle.

The past and future tenses become useful to science when it gets involved in irreversible events, when beginning, middle and end will run only in that order. What happened two seconds after the Big Bang? What happened when Male Beta took Male Alpha's banana? What will happen if I add this hydrochloric acid? These are events that made, or will make, a difference. The existence of a future—a time different from now, a then—depends on the irreversibility of time; in human terms, upon mortality. In Eternity there is nothing novel, and there are no novels.

So, when the storyteller by the hearth starts out, "Once upon a time, a long way from here, lived a king who had three sons," that story will be telling us that things change; that events have consequences; that choices are to be made; that the king does not live forever.

Narrative is a stratagem of morality. It is a means, a way of living. It does not seek immortality; it does not seek or triumph over or escape from time (as lyric poetry does). It asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful. If the human mind had a temporal spectrum, the nirvana of the physicist or the mystic would be way over in the ultraviolet, and at the opposite end, in the infrared, would be *Wuthering Heights*.

To put it another way: Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origin, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story.

I would guess that preverbal narration takes place almost continuously on the unconscious level, but pre- or nonverbal mental operations are very hard to talk about. Dreams might help.

It has been found that during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the recurrent phase of sleep during which we dream abundantly, the movement of the eyes is intermittent. If you wake the dreamer while the eyes are flicking, the dreams reported are disconnected, jumbled, snatches and flashes of imagery; but, awakened during a quiet-eye period, the dreamer reports a "proper dream," a story. Researchers call the image-jumble "primary visual experience" and the other "secondary cognitive elaboration."

Concerning this, Liam Hudson wrote (in the *Times Literary Supplement* of January 25, 1980):

While asleep, then, we experience arbitrary images, and we also tell ourselves stories. The likelihood is that we weave the second around the first, embedding images that we perceive as bizarre in a fabric that seems to us more reasonable. If I confront myself, while asleep, with the image of a crocodile on the roof of a German *Schloss*, and then, while still fast asleep, create for myself some plausible account of how this implausible event has occurred, I am engaged in the manoeuvre of rationalization—of rendering sensible-seeming something that is not sensible in the least. In the course of this manoeuvre, the character of the original image is falsified. . .

The thinking we do without thinking about it consists in the translation of our experience to narrative, irrespective of whether our experience fits the narrative form or not. . . . Asleep and awake it is just the same: we are telling ourselves stories all the time, . . . tidier stories than the evidence warrants.

Mr. Hudson's summary of the material is elegant, and his interpretation of it is, I take it, Freudian. Dreamwork is *rationalization*, therefore it is *fabrication*: a cover-up. The mind is an endless Watergate. Some primitive "reality" or "truth" is forever being distorted, lied about, tidied up.

But what if we have no means of access to this truth or reality except through the process of "lying," except through the narrative? Where are we supposed to be standing in order to judge what "the evidence warrants"?

Take Mr. Hudson's crocodile on the roof of a German castle (it is certainly more interesting than what I dreamed last night). We can all make that image into a story. Some of us will protest, No no! I can't tell stories, etc., having been terrorized by our civilization into believing that we are, or have to be, "rational." But all of us can make that image into some kind of story, and if it came into our heads while we were asleep, no doubt we would do so without a qualm, without giving it a second thought. As I have methodically practiced irrational behavior for many years, I can turn it into a story almost as easily as waking as asleep. What has happened is that Prince Metemich was keeping a crocodile to frighten his aunt with, and the crocodile has escaped through a skylight onto the curious, steep, leaden roofs of the castle, and it is clambering, in the present tense because it is a dream and outside time, towards a machiolated nook in which lies, in a stork's nest, but the stork is in Africa, an egg, a wonderful, magical Easter egg of sugar containing a tiny window through which you look and you see— But the dreamer is awakened here. And if there is any "message" to the dream, the dreamer is not aware of it; the dream with its "message" has gone from the unconscious to the unconscious, like most dreams, without any processing describable as "rationalization," and without ever being verbalized (unless and until the dreamer, in some kind of therapy, has learned laboriously to retrieve and hold and verbalize dreams). In this case all the dreamer—we need a name for this character, let us call her Edith Driemer—all Edith remembers, fleetingly, is something about a roof, a crocodile, Germany, Easter, and while thinking dimly about her great-aunt Esther in Munich, she is presented with further "primary visual (or sensory) experiences" running in this temporal sequence: A loud ringing in the left ear. Blinding light. The smell of an exotic herb. A toilet. A pair of used shoes. A disembodied voice screaming in Pansee. A kiss. A sea of shining clouds. Terror. Twilight in the branches of a tree outside the window of a strange room in an unknown city. . . .

Are these the "primary experiences" experienced while her eyes move rapidly, furnishing material for the next dream? They could well be; but by following Aristotle's directions and making purely temporal connections between them, we can make of them quite a realistic narration of the day Edith woke up and turned off the alarm clock, got up and got dressed, had breakfast listening to the radio news, kissed Mr. Driemer goodbye, and took a plane to Cincinnati in order to attend a meeting of market analysts.

I submit that though this network of "secondary elaboration" may be more rationally controlled than that of the pretended dream, the primary material on which it must work can be considered inherently as bizarre, as absurd, as the crocodile on the roof, and that the factual account of Edith Driemer's day is no more and not less than the dream-story a "manoeuvre," "rendering sensible-seeming something that is not sensible in the least."

Dream narrative differs from conscious narrative in using sensory symbol more than language. In dream the sense of the directionality of time is often replaced by spatial metaphor, or may be lowered, or reversed, or vanish. The connections dream makes between events are most often unsatisfactory to the rational intellect and the aesthetic mind. Dreams tend to flout Aristotle's rules of plausibility and muddle up his instructions concerning plot. Yet they are undeniably narrative: they connect events, fit things together in an order or a pattern that makes,

to some portion of our mind, sense.

Looked at as a "primary visual (sensory) experience," in isolation, without connection to any context or event, each of our experiences is equally plausible or implausible, authentic or inauthentic, meaningful or absurd. But living creatures go to considerable pains to escape equally, to evade entropy, chaos, and old night. They arrange things. They make sense, literally. Molecule by molecule. In the cell. The cells arrange themselves. The body is an arrangement in spacetime, a patterning, a process: the mind is a process of the body, an organ, doing what organs do: organize. Order, pattern, connect. Do we have any better way to organize such wildly disparate experiences as a half-remembered crocodile, a dead great-aunt, the smell of coffee, a scream from Iran, a bumpy landing, and a hotel room in Cincinnati, than the narrative—an immensely flexible technology, or life strategy, which if used with skill and resourcefulness presents each of us with that most fascinating of all serials, *The Story of My Life*.

I have read of a kind of dream that is symptomatic of one form of schizophrenia. The dream presents an object, a chair perhaps, or a coat, or a stump. Nothing happens, and there is nothing else in the dream. Seen thus in spatial and temporal isolation, the primary experience or image can be the image of despair itself (like Sature's tree root). Becken's work yearns toward this condition. In the other direction, Rilke's celebration of "Things"—a chair, a coat, a stump—offers connection: a piece of furniture is part of the pattern of the room, of the life, a bed is a table in a swoon (in one of his French poems), forests are in the stump, the pitcher is also the river, and the hand, and the cup, and the thimble.

Whether the technique is narrative or not, the primary experience has to be connected with and fitted into the rest of experience to be useful, probably even to be available, to the mind. This may hold even for mystical perception. All mystics say that what they have experienced in vision cannot be fitted into ordinary time and space, but they try—they have to try. The vision is ineffable, but the story begins, "In the middle of the road of my life . . ."

It may be that an inability to fit events together in an order that is at least seems to make sense, to make the narrative connection, is a radical incompetence at being human. So seen, stupidity could be defined as a failure to make enough connections, and insanity as severe repeated error in making connections—in telling *The Story of My Life*.

But nobody does it right all the time, or even most of the time. Even without identifying narration with falsification, one must admit what a vast amount of our life narration is fictional—how much, we cannot tell.

But if narration is a life stratagem, a survival skill, how can I get away, asleep and awake, with mistaking and distorting and omitting data, through wishful thinking, ignorance, laziness, and haste? If the ghostwriter in my head writing *The Story of My Life* is forgetful, careless, mendacious, a hack who doesn't care what happens so long as it makes some kind of story, why don't I get punished? Radical errors in interpreting and reacting to the environment aren't let off lightly, in either the species or the individual.

Is the truthfulness of the story, then, the all-important value; or is the quality of the fiction important too? Is it possible that we all keep going in very much the same way as Queen Dido or Don Quixote keeps going—by virtue of being almost entirely fictional characters?

Anyone who knows J. T. Fraser's work, such as his book *Of Time, Passion, and Knowledge*, and that of George Steiner, will have perceived my debt to them in trying to think about the uses of narrative. I am not always able to follow Mr. Steiner; but when he discusses the importance of the future tense, suggesting that statements about what does not exist and may never exist are central to the use of language, I follow him cheering and waving pom-poms. When he makes his well-known statement "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is," I continue to follow, through with lowered pom-poms. The proposition as stated worries me. Man's refusal to accept the world as it is? Do women also refuse? What about science, which tries so hard to see the world as it is? What about art, which not only accepts the dreadful world as it is but praises it for being so? Isn't life a terrible thing, thank God? Is the lady with the backyard full of washing and babies in *Under Milk Wood*, and the sweet song says,

## Read This

Recently Read and recommended by Richard Kadrey:

*Deserted Cities of the Heart* by Lewis Shiner (Foundation)

The best SF novel of the year, period. This is one of those rare books with both heart and brains in equal parts, meaning it's an exciting story that also has something to say about being alive. If this doesn't walk off with the Nebula, all SF writers should be ashamed.

*Heatmaker* by John Shirley (Scream Press)

Shirley's first collection of stories is like a jeweled cobra: exquisite and deadly. A prime example of what Andre Breton meant when he wrote, "Beauty must be convulsive or it will not be at all."

*Blood and Guts in High School* by Kathy Acker (Grove Press)

You may not have heard of Kathy Acker, but she should be required reading. Her postmodernist novels/poems thrash like Genet on speed; she's influenced a number of science fiction writers, including many of the cyberpunks.

*Mind Children* by Hans Moravec (Harvard University Press)

A non-fiction polemic on how we can all look forward to jauntily downloading our psyches into immortal robot bodies and getting rid of this tacky flesh once and for all. If the author wasn't a professor of robotics at Carnegie-Mellon, he would probably be locked up. Perhaps he should be anyway.

*Prayers of Steel* by Misha (Wordscraft)

If you wondered (or cared) if cyberpunk could produce good poetry, look no further. Which isn't to tag Misha with a label. She is very much her own writer, bending a number of styles into something new and wholly her own.

*Gene Wars* by Charles Piller and Keith Yamato (Beech Tree)

An account of the wacky, wonderful world of genetic engineering from a military perspective (i.e., chemical and biological warfare). If you ever wondered just how fucked up the world could get, read this one and *Mind Children*.

*Apocalypse Culture* edited by Adam Parfrey (Amok Press)

Interviews and rants by necrophiles, pornographers, schizophrenics, S&M performance artists, conspiracy theorists, etc. Reading a book like this reminds me why I hate most aliens in SF: the real world is a thousand times more alien than anything you could make up.

"Nobody knows the trouble I seen. Glory, Hallelujah!" I agree with them. All grand refusals, especially when made by Man, are deeply suspect.

So, caviling all the way, I follow Mr. Steiner. If the use of language were to describe accurately what exists, what, in fact, would we want it for?

Surely the primary, survival-effective uses of language involve stating alternatives and hypotheses. We don't, we never did, go about making statements of fact to other people, or in our internal discourse with ourselves. We talk about what may be, or what we'd like to do, or what you ought to do, or what might have happened: warnings, suppositions, propositions, invocations, ambiguities, analogies, hints, lists, anxieties, hearsay, old wives' tales, leaps and cross-links and spiderwebs between here and there, between then and now, between now and sometime, a continual weaving and restructuring of the

remembered and the perceived and the imagined, including a great deal of wishful thinking and a variable quantity of deliberate or non-deliberate fictionalization, to reassure ourselves or for the pleasure of it, and also some deliberate or semi-deliberate falsification in order to mislead a rival or persuade a friend or escape despair; and no sooner have we made one of these patterns of words than we may, like Shelley's cloud, laugh, and arise, and unbuild it again.

In recent centuries, we speakers of this lovely language have reduced the English verb almost entirely to the indicative mood. But beneath that specious and arrogant assumption of certainty all the ancient, cloudy, moody powers and options of the subjunctive remain in force. The indicative points its bony finger at primary experiences, at the Things; but it is the subjunctive that joins them, with the bonds of analogy, possibility, probability, contingency, contiguity, memory, desire, fear, and hope: the narrative connection. As J. T. Fraser puts in, moral choice, which is to say human freedom, is made possible "by language, which permits us to give accounts of possible and impossible worlds in the past, in the future, or in a faraway land."

Fiction in particular, narration in general, may be seen not as a disguise or falsification of what is given but as an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives, and an enlargement of present reality by connecting it to the unverifiable past and the unpredictable future. A totally factual narrative, were there such a thing, would be passive: a mirror reflecting all without distortion.

## Ambient by Jack Womack

New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987; \$15.95 (Can) hc; 259 pp.

Reviewed by Veronica Hollinger

*Ambient*, a first novel by New Yorker Jack Womack, reads like something by William Gibson out of Anthony Burgess. It was probably a good thing that Womack hadn't read *Neuromancer* before completing this near-future dystopia—for the same reason that Gibson had to walk out of *Blade Runner* before he found his own first novel already written for him. *Ambient* is as close to cyberpunk as an SF novel can get, but it distinguishes itself from the work of Movement writers like Gibson, John Shirley and Bruce Sterling by, among other things, its wonderful attention to and play with language. Indeed, the linguistic experimentation in *Ambient*, which inevitably recalls novels like *A Clockwork Orange* (as the jacket blurb doesn't let us forget) is what makes this book particularly worth reading.

The publishers would also like us to believe that *Ambient* shares some of the "nightmarish vision" of J. G. Ballard, but there they are rather wide of the mark. If Ballard's fictional worlds are indelibly marked by the oppressive weight of an ever-increasing entropy, Womack's near-future New York positively bubbles with energy—and "positively" is the important word here. The constant and mindless violence which makes up so much of the background of the novel is recounted with a cheerful off-handedness very reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*. Womack's narrator, Seamus O'Malley, and Burgess's narrator, Alex, are both prone to describing the most harrowing scenarios in tones of pleasantly ironic bemusement. In spite of a certain stylish world-weariness, however, *Ambient* is finally an optimistic novel, and its basic good-heartedness is one thing that sets it off from both *A Clockwork Orange* and *Neuromancer*. And it couldn't be further from the terminal-bench syndrome of disaster novels like Ballard's *The Drowned World* or *The Crystal World*.

Let me get the bad news out of the way before I go further. Womack's story-line is wonderfully straightforward and so are his characters; the best that one can say of his plot and characterization is that they are uncomplicated. O'Malley, the central character, is body guard and business advisor to Mr. Dryden, CEO of the world's most powerful mega-corporation, Dryco. O'Malley is in love with Avalon, Mr. Dryden's "proxy" (every important businessman has one) and if he agrees to assassinate Mr. Dryden's father, the Old Man, he gets Avalon for himself (which suits her well enough). The complications which ensue after the failure of the attempted assassination, mostly revolving around chases, disappearances, vicious battles and an incredible

Sendahl sentimentalized about the novel as such a mirror, but fiction does not reflect, nor is the narrator's eye that of a camera. The historian manipulates, arranges, and connects, and the storyteller does all that as well as intervening and inventing. Fiction connects possibilities, using the aesthetic sense of time's directionality defined by Aristotle as plot; and by doing so it is useful to us. If we cannot see our acts as being under the aspect of fiction, as "making sense," we cannot act as if we were free.

To describe narrative as "rationalization" of the given or of events is a blind alley. In the telling of a story, reason is only a support system. It can provide causal connections; it can extrapolate; it can judge what is likely, plausible, possible. All this is crucial to the invention of a good story, a sane fantasy, a sound piece of fiction. But reason by itself cannot get from the crocodile to Cincinnati. It cannot see that Elizabeth is, in fact, going to marry Darcy, and why. It may not even ever quite understand who it was, exactly, that Oedipus did marry. We cannot ask reason to take us across the gulfs of the absurd. Only the imagination can get us out of the bind of the eternal present, inventing or hypothesizing or pretending or discovering a way that reason can then follow into the infinity of options, a clue through the labyrinths of choice, a golden string, the story, leading us to the freedom that is properly human, the freedom open to those whose minds can accept unreality.

This essay, "Some Thoughts on Narrative," will appear in the US in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, a collection of essays by Ursula K. Le Guin forthcoming from Grove Press in February 1989.

number of explosions, make up the major part of the novel.

And Avalon's role, in spite of some attempt on Womack's part to establish her as an independent actor in his drama, is simply to provide the prize at the end of his hero's successful adventuring. Womack is pretty conventional in his handling of female characters. This is not to say that he doesn't occasionally try for something a bit more original and true to life, just that he's not very successful at it. On the other hand, I do appreciate the neat irony of the "Equality Acts" passed in this future "ours was not a society to favor the exploitation of women over any other group equally available" (66). Things are pretty grim for everyone in Womack's New York.

The plot's chief mystery—what is the Old Man sitting on that enables him to push around both the government and the Army?—also proves to be a disappointment, resolving itself into an anti-climax which weakens the last part of the novel. Obviously, the basic ingredients here are pretty unexceptional: tough street-wise hero, tough sexy heroine, and various and sundry thugs and sinister corporate power-mongers who want them out of the way. There is nothing here to make *Ambient* stand out from any other SF adventure novel.

The best way to introduce its real attractions is to recall the visual effects of a film like *Blade Runner*—the profusion of fascinating detail with which director Ridley Scott creates his near-future Los Angeles is certainly far more interesting for the viewer than the details of Rick Deckard's interminable efforts to terminate outlaw androids. And it is the same profusion of detail used to build up the picture of Womack's near-future New York which is one of the main strengths of *Ambient*, and which, in its attention to surface and texture, identifies it as part of a contemporary and even postmodern kind of SF writing. *Ambient* is a novel in love with detail for its own sake, and, on this level, achieves a richness which more than makes up for its pedestrian plot.

The events of the story take place take place about twenty years after the "Goblin Year," the year in which the government of the United States collapsed under the weight of its own "enthralling lies" (20). Old Man Dryden and Susie D., his wife, emerge from the debate with almost complete economic control of the country, bolstered by the mysterious threat which the Old Man holds over the heads of subsequent administrations. The present world is in the hands of big business, even National Defense is at the Old Man's beck and call, and the Greenhouse effect is threatening to inundate the entire city except for

the Bronx.

As might be expected, New York has become a collection of war-zones, "protected" by a Home Army which manages to do as much damage as the various terrorist groups (such as the Dreds, the Nation of Aztlán, Nouveaux Maroons, Black Wicca Women, and the Sons of the Pioneers) who seem to be in the process of blowing up whatever managed to survive the Goblin Year. O'Malley lives with his sister Enid in a "Twilight Zone," outside the jurisdiction or protection of the Army. Here, even hot dogs are different:

I fastfood it only on payday; at least my Drydencaid exed me from the 30 percent VAT added to all goods' retail cost. Dogs R'Us, safe for all, used only organic additives in its wares; you could be sure of what they held even if you couldn't choose the breed. . . . On occasion splurge becomes a must. I ate five wienies. Three eleven-year-olds served up; the girl wore manager garb. Her wedding photo hung over the counter; the couple, in full dress, stood by the sprout bar, hard by the plastic Happy Dog figurine. (54)

One of Womack's main devices for filling in the details (a technique used very effectively, for example, in the film *Robocop*) is to weave a constant barrage of media input into the narrative. A typical newspaper headline: "IS YOUR SPOUSE A REINGARNATED SEX KILLER?" with the True Story of The Hackensack Ripper As Told By His Ex-Wife From Beyond the Grave" (82). And a television news report:

A witch was burned in Ohio. In Japan a defense plant leaked cumulonimbus clouds of azure gas; forth thousand died. The anchor raised her eyebrows, as if she were in on the joke.

"Coming up next," she said, "Cattle mutilators—friend or foe?" (130)

And, finally, there's language in *Ambient*, all sorts of language, from the bizspeak of the corporate executives ("Dryden here. A.O. They imaged, then? You did? Prokashnik! Spot them twice over. My account. A.O." (471)), to the milarese of the Army boys ("Report in from Mount Misery, sir. Recon op prime zero down. Tactical regression sustained. Over." [184]), and, overshadowing it all, the language of the Ambients. It is their presence, always in the background, spectators rather than

participants, which gives the novel its real form.

The original Ambients are the offspring of a nuclear accident on Long Island, and they have been joined in the inner city by others (an aspect of Womack's plot which recalls Bernard Wolfe's far more chilling dystopian novel *Limbo*):

By altering the body in unappealing ways and thus becoming voluntary, the non-Ambient might not only find kinship but could as well demonstrate the iniquity of a society that forced one to do such. (68)

O'Malley's sister, Enid, is a voluntary Ambient and probably the most colourful character in the novel. In a world of such physical deformity, only language can sustain beauty, and in its love of linguistic flights and fancies, the outcast Ambient culture has created something truly beautiful, which Womack, to his credit, is able to sustain in his writing. As Enid explains to Avalon:

Even in limned path our way lends pause to smug minds. . . . See us and see what dwells deep under seemly form. Beneath blue eyes and golden moor. No shelter gives shield to our constancy. Our fire sets its own track, and by our glow, the blind see. The deaf hear. The unknowing know. Those unafraid tremble and shake. (166)

This is the paradox of *Ambient* as well, a dystopian novel written with a completely loving attention to words which are no longer simply a vehicle for plot and character. This is a long way from the "transparent" language of most SF.

It's a real pleasure to come across SF novels which keep in mind the constantly shifting nature of words and their meanings, the slippery gaps between signs and their referents, and it's even more of a pleasure to find writers who have the skill to undertake these novels successfully. While *Ambient* lacks the sheer brilliance of Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, I found its linguistic experimentation more cohesive and satisfying than, for example, Norman Spinrad's *The Void Captain's Tale*, and, perhaps, less "mechanical" than Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. I'll let Enid have the last word: "My blood beats your heart alafter, everafter, till time's lovely end. Take as you will." (83) ▶

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## Full Spectrum, edited by Lou Aronica and Shawna McCarthy

Bantam, New York, 1988 \$4.95 483 pp.

Reviewed by Susan Palwick

In their introduction to this anthology, Aronica and McCarthy write, "We know there is no one area of science fiction and fantasy that can possibly satisfy our longing to have worlds opened, to turn reality on its ear." Accordingly, the editors promise to deliver stories in "all of the traditional subgenres" of the field, stories characterized by "very, very fine writing."

The writing in these twenty-five stories is indeed above average: all of it at least competent, some of it more so. While the stories are readable and sincere, however, few of them are daring—and the spectrum they cover is a far more limited one than Aronica and McCarthy suggest in the introduction. Among the traditional subgenres not included here are high fantasy, space opera, sword and sorcery, and supernatural horror. Many of Aronica and McCarthy's intended readers may not like these particular subgenres very much, but one can't deny their importance to the field or the fact that many readers currently in the field experienced their first taste of wonder—the commodity Aronica and McCarthy claim to be selling—from these particular bands in the rainbow.

I would have been a good deal more interested in an anthology which tried to include particularly fine examples of these kinds of fiction. Instead of representing the full spectrum of speculation, Aronica and McCarthy have redefined it into a narrow band of primarily

contemporary, character-oriented pieces revealing distinctly liberal political leanings. Mind you, I'm nothing against this kind of fiction, since it's what I write, but the emphasis on this kind of story makes the anthology read like a particularly large, satisfying issue of McCarthy's *Asimov's*. McCarthy's *Asimov's* was a fine magazine, and my first two contemporary-liberal-character-oriented stories appeared there, so I'm forever indebted to it. But represent the entire spectrum of the field it most emphatically didn't, and that's what Aronica and McCarthy have promised here. As a result, I came away feeling cheated.

This is no reflection whatsoever on the writers in this volume, who are without exception talented, although not as unilaterally brilliant as Aronica and McCarthy would lead us to believe in the story introductions. If the anthology introduction makes inflated claims for the entire book, the story introductions all too often make inflated claims for individual pieces. We are told of Elissa Malcovich's "Moments of Clarity" that "When you read for a living, you don't often find fiction that stops you in your tracks." (Do lawyers and accountants often find such fiction? There's an implication here that non-editors have sufficiently unsophisticated reading skills that they can be floored by mediocre work.) We're told that the story requires "a good half hour of recovery time." Aronica and McCarthy continue, "We don't recommend reading it before operating heavy machinery."

Only two or three works I've read in my entire life justify that kind of claim, and this story isn't one of them. It's a well-written and moderately moving tale of a dying woman, but the representation of death in fiction doesn't automatically devastate the reader. The story neither stopped me in my tracks nor impaired my typing ability, and Aronson and McCarthy are doing both Malcolmb and her readers a disservice by making such extreme claims.

Furthermore, I resent being told how I should react to a story—or, indeed, how I should read it. In the intro to Thomas Disch's "Voices of the Kill," the editors tell us, "it's vintage Disch—which means you should keep your eyes wide open."

Do most readers approach stories with their eyes closed? Do we need to be warned that James Morrow's "After the Deluge" may offend some of us? Such caveats combine condescension with self-congratulation: how astute these editors are to have chosen such wonderful material, even if the audience needs an instruction manual to read it

properly! And while editorial pride is natural, it shouldn't be stated in the language of back-cover copy hype, readers who have already bought the book don't need sales pitches, and readers who fall for the excessive PR will almost certainly be disappointed in the actual fiction.

The book would stand nicely on its own without such hyperbole. It contains five promising first sales—for which the editors and authors both deserve much credit—as well as graceful and involving tales by more established hands such as Nancy Kress, Pat Murphy (whose story wasn't speculative, but mainstream), and a color in the spectrum too), the aforementioned Tom Disch, and Lisa Goldstein. Morrow, Spinrad, and Shiner contribute the controversial entries, and the prize for the single strangest tale in the book has to go to Richard Grant's "Magister Rudy." While I don't choose to describe all twenty-five stories here, all of them are worth reading.

There now, that doesn't sound like a negative review, does it? And it's not. Buy the book. Enjoy it. Just don't read the introductions. ▶

## Divine Endurance by Gwyneth Jones

London: Allen & Unwin, 1984; New York: Arbor House, 1987; \$15.95 hc; xv + 233 pp.; Tor pb 1989

reviewed by William M. Schuyler, Jr.

On the whole, I detest post-holocaust stories. After reading so many which recount in stirring terms the triumphant survival of a small brave band against all odds and common sense by luck, pluck and ingenuity, I have become hypersensitized, and I break out in hives when I encounter one. They show a certain lack of imagination: if you want to talk about this sort of thing, there are less garish ways to set it up, it just takes a little more work. If you want to update Robinson Crusoe or Swiss Family Robinson, put it on another planet and let the rest of us live in peace.

Universal plagues are preferable, if only because they can be expected without undue optimism to leave the biosphere for those who are fortunate (if that's the word) enough to survive. They are also egalitarian: it seems unlikely that the only survivors should be WASPs, as is too often the premise of post-holocaust stories. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that in most post-holocaust stories the survivors are WASPs regardless of ethnic origin or religious affiliation.

It isn't that I think a nuclear disaster is implausible, but rather that I think the survival of anyone for very long after one is unlikely. Moreover, the survivors are most likely to be people on whom no one would waste a bomb. That does leave an opening for one or two special subtypes of the plot: the variation where things go from bad to worse, and the one which is set in an out of the way corner of the world, especially the Third World. These are depressing, but they have a chance of attaining integrity. On the other hand, I find little in gentle resignation to recommend it to me. This leaves stories of those who will not go gently into that good night, though go they must. They are a gloomy lot, but they have their virtues.

If there is anything more odious than post-holocaust stories, it is surely stories about folk tales and children's stories which have cuddly little animals as major characters. (There are a few honorable exceptions, such as Animal Farm.) Stories by anthropologists tend to be especially offensive. No cat worthy of the name would act with the earnestness and nobility generally attributed to these superfluous.

This brings us to the matter at hand, which is Gwyneth Jones's *Divine Endurance*. It is a post-holocaust story with a cat as a major character, and it's one of the best books to be published in the field in the last few years.

Most of it is set in the Malay peninsula. Jones calls it simply Peninsula.) A long time ago, centuries at least, there was an atomic war which left Peninsula relatively unscathed. This is not too implausible. Why bother to bomb it? And if the time of year were right, it might have escaped most of the wind borne fallout.

The survivors who ended up quarrelling over the scraps were Malayo-Indonesians and some survivors of the American military. The Americans, who had high-tech weapons, managed to install themselves as the Rulers, using as their agents the Koperasi (= cooperatives - quislings), most of whom are by this time their half-caste descendants. This was an ugly situation, but it seemed that a *modus vivendi* had been

reached over the years which was not quite intolerable to the victims of the Rulers.

It is the richness and detail with which the Peninsular social system is drawn that make this book such a marvel. Southeast Asia was flooded by waves of Hindu and Buddhist influence long before our time, and they had an indelible impact on the native culture without eliminating its most distinctive features. Chinese and English influences also left their marks, but more superficially. The evolved form that this culture has taken—would have had to take—is exquisitely worked out.

I do not know if Jones has read anything by the psychiatrist Eric Berne, but some of his ideas are relevant here. Berne argued that each of us is given at an early age a "script," a pattern after which we unconsciously model our lives. These scripts embody not only our parents' expectations for us but also the general expectations in our social system about the proper ways for a person with certain goals (defined in the script) to interact with other people. These general expectations are so deeply ingrained that for the most part we never become sufficiently aware of them to ask whether they make sense, and they usually don't. Berne further argued that these scripts and the expectations they carry with them can be seen in a highly schematic form in nursery stories, fairytales and the like, which is one of the places where small children learn what options are available to them. As Berne was well aware, different cultures have different expectations (which is one reason why their fairy tales don't make much sense to us, and vice-versa).

The point of this is that the inhabitants of Peninsula find their scripts in the Hindu epics, the life of Buddha, and other stories which may not be well known to us but permeate their culture (even in our time) in the same way that the Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen, and the Bible permeate ours. One character in *Divine Endurance*, Prince Atoton, is explicitly expected to behave on the model of the Pandavi Prince Arjuna, one of the major figures in the *Mahabharata*. Another, Derveet, heiress of the house of Garuda, the hereditary rulers of Peninsula, sees in her life a strong parallel with the life of Buddha.

If Jones had done no more than adapt these stories by changing their names and settings, we would have done better to turn to the originals. But she did much, much more. Prince Atoton often feels that the Arjuna script does not really fit him. Knowing what Arjuna would do and why, he has a strong (and as it turns out, correct) feeling that it is not what he should do in his circumstances. Only by repeated appeals to his honor is he coerced into going against his better judgment. In one extraordinary scene, he and Derveet virtually reenact part of the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, but the surface correspondence conceals an underlying disparity of circumstances which could only lead to tragedy if everything went as it was supposed to. The resemblance of Derveet's life to the Buddha's turns out to be real but superficial, and the absence of a deep congruence leads to disastrous results.

But there is more to a society than its scripts. The dominant force in each of the old princely states which has been suppressed by the Rulers is the Dapur. This is an institution that began as the royal harem. Its power and significance are much greater than that. The ladies have taken the techniques of the Hindu and Buddhist mystics to somewhere near their limits, and they are much less reluctant to apply them than are those we have with us.

The fact that they have rejected Western style technology has not hindered them in developing a mastery of formidable powers, including medical techniques based on herbal medicine and meditation which achieves results that even the Rulers cannot match. In addition to healing, they have used their arts to institute a ruthless program of eugenics. They arrange for most boys to be born sterile. Many girls also turn out to be sterile, although judgment on them is based simply on whether or not they can bear viable children.

Before judging the Dapurs too harshly, we should bear in mind that they are trying to insure the survival of humankind in a world where the genetic load is very high. We should also remember that the techniques which they wield are accessible only to those who reached an advanced stage of spiritual development. The ladies may still be human enough to be fallible, but they could not be corrupt or venal and yet accomplish what they do.

When this is understood, much of the rest of the social structure slides neatly, if appallingly, into place. But something has disturbed the balance. Things are deteriorating faster and faster. Let us look at matters from the point of view of Divine Endurance (Ca) and Chosen Among the Beautiful (Cho). They are artificial creatures, of feline and human form respectively, who have a single purpose: to give people *whatever they really want*.

The manufacturers of Divine Endurance never released her from the factory where she was made centuries ago. She was rather too

insightful and literal-minded to allow for the comfort and survival of their customers. Cho, on the other hand, is the last of a series in which such difficulties were thought to have been overcome. But the manufacturers are long since dead in the war, and so when she was built by the automated factory centuries later, only a senile computer and Cat were left to raise her.

Cat, for a wonder, really *is* a cat. She is very fastidious and mannerly, which is entirely in accord with the goals of her manufacturers. It is she who teaches Cho proper manners, such as the requirements that one eat and sleep, which neither of them needs to do. There are also the finer points, such as that if one is well-bred, one eats only meat, and that decency requires one to bury the bones afterwards. Cat even introduces Cho to cooking (a practice which she herself feels is senseless) since she is aware that people feel otherwise. If Cho's subsequent behavior sometimes seems bizarre, it is certainly in accord with her upbringing.

When an earthquake destroys their home, they set out to fulfill their purpose. Eventually, they arrive in Peninsula, where they set to work. Much of what they do is straightforward. When you read this book for the second time, you will begin to see how good they really are at what they do.

You will find that the book is worth reading a second time. The writing is supple and deceptively clear and vigorous. I have mentioned some of the material on which Jones has drawn in her construction of Peninsular culture; it might seem that only a scholar could appreciate it. This is not so. Jones has included all you really need to know, and she has done it without lecturing her readers. You will read it again to savor felicitous turns of phrase, and to find where she laid the groundwork for some remarkable turn of events. If you look carefully, you will find that she never cheats. As in a well made detective story, all the clues are there, disguised as throwaways and local color. Enjoy it as a good read—but come back to it for the treasure which lies under the surface.

### ***Those Who Hunt the Night* by Barbara Hambly**

New York: Del Rey, 1988; \$16.95 hb; 296 pp.

Reviewed by Greg Cox



As a reader of today's horror fiction, it's easy to feel like an inhabitant of Salem's Lot, or, worse yet, the world of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*: surrounded by vampires with no escape in sight. At least ten new vampire novels were published in 1988 alone, some with considerable fanfare. Never mind the short stories, reprints, movies, and comic books.

So what does this mean? Is it time for a moratorium on blood-suckers altogether? No, no more than SF could banish time travel or alien invasions from its standard bag of tricks. We are simply long past the point where shrieking "Look! It's a vampire!" is enough to justify a story's existence. For that matter, I'm not sure that even "Look, it's a clever new variation on a vampire!" will suffice.

Take, for instance, *Those Who Hunt the Night*. In this Victorian horror-mystery, a retired English spy, Professor James Asher, is coerced by Don Simon Ysidro, a three-hundred-year-old Castilian undead, to find the "day stalker" who is exposing Ysidro's peers to terminal doses of sunlight. (Sort of "Who is Killing the Great Vampires of Europe?") To Hambly's credit, she gradually reveals, via Asher's investigation, an elaborate and cohesive theory of vampirism and vampire society that manages to accommodate the usual traditions while still leaving room for surprises—as did, however, such books as *The Vampire Lestat* by Anne Rice, *Fear Dream* by George R.R. Martin, *The Delicate Dependency* by Michael Talbot, *Vampyr* by Jan Jennings, *Those of My Blood* by Jacqueline Lichtenberg, and *Bloodlines* by Lee Kilgough. The latter, published earlier this year, even featured a similar string of murdered vampires. In short, even after Hambly's considerable efforts to make her vampires distinctive, a certain sense of déjà vu remains inevitable.

But if the basic idea of a vampire will not carry a story, and if truly new variations on the theme are hard to find, we are still left with the matter of *execution*, and it is here that this book reveals the secret of its relative success; in many ways, *Those Who Hunt the Night* is a better crafted novel than Anne Rice's spectacularly messy *Queen of the Damned*. The pacing is surface-footed, the prose evocative where it needs

to be, and the characters engaging, enough so in my case to make a particularly hellish four-hour train ride pass much more enjoyably.

Granted, this works better as period thriller than as a whodunit. Without being too specific, the solution to the mystery of the murdered vampires comes from out of left field and is something of a cheat; not only is a vital clue withheld from the reader, but the ultimate twist depends on an imaginative, but hitherto-unknown, form of vampirism that the reader has no reason to even know exists. The effect is like that of a locked room mystery in which it turns out that, by god, Martians can walk through walls! This failure to define the limits of one's fictional universe is of course one of the classic traps of SF/fantasy/mystery genre-crossing.

Still, the investigation itself, as it leads us through the shadowy vampire communities of London and Paris, is worth following, as is the nicely ambivalent relationship between Asher and Ysidro. It is not too surprising that these reluctant allies should eventually develop a grudging respect and affection for each other, but Hambly makes Asher's slow reassessment of the vampire believable, while never letting Asher (or the reader) forget that Ysidro is, after all, a thousand times the murderer their mutual quarry is. Ysidro ended up reminding me of Long John Silver or M. J. Engh's *Arkian*, an unrepentant villain whom one doesn't want to like, but does. And Asher, whose own past as a government agent is none too clean, remains acutely conscious of the awkward, unavoidable moral compromises involved.

*Those Who Hunt the Night* is not a landmark work that will forever color our view of vampires, as did, say, Sturgeon's *Some of Your Blood* and a select handful of other books. But it does demonstrate how craft can take overused materials and turn out an entertaining work of fiction. Given that this same author once managed to make a *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* crossover work as something more than a joke, this should not come as a terrible surprise. The result is, if not one of the best vampire novels of all time, then possibly the best one winging its way in this vampire-infested year. ▶

## Mama Day by Gloria Naylor

New York: Tinknor & Fields, 1988; \$17.95 hc; 312 pp.

### Beloved by Toni Morrison

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987; \$18.95; 275 pp.

Reviewed by Della Sherman



What's this? These aren't fantasies, you say. These are mainstream books, literary books, books you find displayed at the front of B. Dalton's next to *Garfield Gains Weight*. They were reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, for chrissakes. Well, yes they were, and yes they are. So were John Crowley's *Exile* and Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*. But you'll have to agree that John Crowley, at least, is one of ours, and I contend that both Naylor and Morrison have written books that are more like *Exile* and *Winter's Tale*. Big than they are like anything else the *New York Times* is reviewing.

*Mama Day* is the story of the uneasy courtship and marriage of a young black woman from the rural South and a young black engineer from the urban North. *Mama Day* is equally the story of two questing heroes. Opheelia Day—Cocoa—is the hero who leaves home to seek her fortune. She finds her prince in New York, and after many adventures, brings him home to share her kingdom. George Andrews is the founding hero whose strength of will is honed by adversity. He woo

and wins his princess, rescues her from an evil spell, and comes at last into his own kingdom, the home he's been looking for all of his life.

This epic narrative is not a metaphor for the realistic narrative of *Mama Day*, nor is it simply a structural framework for the story of Cocoa and George. It is the chronicle of a separate reality, which is as logical in its own way as calculus and as dependent on the rules of cause and effect as engineering. In *Mama Day*, this reality is Willow Island, where Cocoa's grandmother and great-aunt live. It exists side-by-side with the reality of New York, where George and Cocoa live. Both Willow Island and Manhattan are equally real, equally solid to the reader, though they are not always equally visible. It's the same situation John Crowley sets up in *Little, Big* and Peter Beagle sets up in *The Folk of the Air*. On the one hand, a familiar city filled with familiar characters and a plot that chronicles happy or unhappy relationships, adolescent angst, urban violence, politics. On the other hand, a forest, a mysterious house, and a fairy-tale plot peopled by demons, fairies, talking animals, goddesses. When adolescent angst disturbs a goddess (as it does in *The Folk of the Air*), or when fairies interfere in national politics (as they do in *Little, Big*), or a conjure woman asks a very skeptical New York engineer to perform a magic ritual, as Cocoa's great-aunt, Mama Day, does George, then the fireworks begin.

There is always one place in works of magic realism where the two realities meet on equal ground, a place where metaphors are the literal truth. In *Little, Big*, the place is Edgewood; in *The Folk of the Air*, it's the house Sis shares with Ben. In *Mama Day*, it's Willow Island in general, and the old Day house in particular, the deserted homestead that Mama Day calls "the other place." When Mama Day is there, she dwells in both realities, growing the herbs she needs as a country healer and performing the rituals of a conjure-woman to allow a barren woman to conceive. She is not a goddess, nor yet an innocent, like the Drinkwater women who preside over *Little, Big*, but she is nevertheless a wholly believable mediator between realities, a testy, cantankerous old woman who is mystical mother to every soul on Willow Island, both the living and the dead.

*Mama Day's* characters and its elaborate magic rituals are rooted in the archetypes of romance. So is the atmosphere of enchantment that pervades Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, but the details of its plot derive more from the conventions of horror.

When Sethe's old master follows her to Ohio to reclaim her and her children, she kills her infant daughter to save her from a life of slavery. Instead of returning to Sweet Home plantation, Sethe goes to jail, and then back to her mother-in-law's house, haunted now by her baby's ghost. Sethe's sons leave as soon as they're old enough, her mother-in-law dies of old age, and when the novel opens, the household is down to Sethe, her youngest daughter Denver, and the ghost. Then one of the Sweet Home slaves, Paul D., shows up on Sethe's doorstep and upsets the uneasy equilibrium of her life, moving in with her and the driving the ghost from the house. Rejected once again, the murdered baby returns in the flesh, not as a child, but as the young woman Sethe prevented her from becoming: Beloved.

Like a vampire, Beloved batters upon the lives of her mother and her sister, but what she feeds upon is not blood. Hungering for a past, she sucks memories from Sethe and emotions from Denver and reduces them to thoughtless automatons only capable of living from moment to moment. Beloved herself is an innocent, corrupted, like Anne Rice's Claudia, by her hungers. But Morrison's novel is finally more like John Crowley's *Exile* than *Interview with the Vampire*. For, like *Exile*, *Beloved* is concerned with history and the power of the past, a power as incalculable and mysterious in its workings as the most arcane wizard's spell.

Although Sethe is no longer any master's personal property, she is still a Sweet Home slave, chained to the past by denying the past. Morrison demonstrates that a piece of property has nothing of its own,

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by Ellen Kuszner:

I don't read anything new: I wait to see if it's become a classic first. Classics come along only about once every seven years. Also, new works tend to be by people one knows, and then, try as one might, one spends all one's time wondering whether that's really their own mother they're describing. She seemed like such a nice lady.

Here are some books I've read (or re-read) lately. Honest.

*A Wizard of Earthsea*, by Ursula K. Le Guin. Oh yeah, it's a classic, but you'd be surprised by how many people haven't read it. Her prose is perfect. A truly Great fantasy, it illuminates reality more truly than anyone could by trying (even Le Guin).

*Cheri & The Last of Cheri*, by Colette. If the past is another country, Colette's Paris is a galaxy far, far away. Even World War I cannot dim the lustre of Cheri's pearls. A doomed love between an ageing demi-mondaine and a pretty young man... something for everyone.

*The Nine Lives of Christopher Chant*, by Diana Wynne Jones. Actually, anything by Jones, even new ones like this. Her plots are so ingenious I forget them quickly, and get to re-read my favorites with a pure mind. Her adults live in the real world and allow it to intrude on the kid-protagonists, whose magic is generally hilarious.

*The Serpent's Egg*, by Caroline Stevermer (Ace). Well, I do read new books by close friends whose feelings about their mothers I already know. A gem of a Renaissance fantasy (no Elves, no dragons, just sinister, well-dressed wizards versed in realpolitik) about, of all quaint, out-moded things, honor and chivalry in changing times. Basil Rathbone was born to play the Duke.

*Letters to a Friend*, by T.H. White, ed. Gallie. What an awful man! Whining, selfish, narrow-minded... so be nice to that clod on the panel next to you: he could be writing a novel you'll cherish for years.

no family, no history, no community—nothing. As long as Sethe pushes the past away from her, as long as she refuses to remember Sweet Home and the husband she thinks deserted her, Sethe will in some sense remain a piece of property. In different ways and for different reasons, Paul D. and Beloved force her to relive her memories of Sweet Home, of her husband Halle, of her mother, and of all the lives, white and black, that crossed hers in her journey to Ohio. Finally, it is an appeal to these memories and what they mean that frees Sethe and Beloved from their common bondage.

Technically, *Beloved* is a more unified novel than *Mama Day*, its magical and supernatural elements so perfectly integrated into its structure that the dead characters and the living all seem to exist in one timeless present. In *Mama Day*, the seams show more. Naylor has chosen to tell her story through three narrators with three distinct voices, one of whom, George, does not believe in the reality of what he sees on Willow Island. His skepticism comes perilously close to

overweighing the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. It's not an insuperable problem, and Naylor does overcome it with the consistent beauty of her prose, but her artful structure gives *Mama Day* the look of something constructed rather than grown, a literary fairy-tale rather than a myth. *Mama Day*—crotchety, ancient, bent over her stick—has something of the fairy-tale which about her. Sethe—humorous, young, unyielding—is more akin to a mythical hero.

Which or, here, these women are of a different breed from the anxious, obsessed protagonists of most naturalistic fiction. Ursula K. Le Guin would say that both Sethe and *Mama Day* speak and act like Lords of Elfland, like women of large character. And Sethe and *Mama Day*, more than mojo magic or spikely ghosts, are what make the books they appear in fantasies, and as fine examples of the genre as any fan of John Crowley or Peter Beagle could hope to find displayed at B. Dalton's.

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# Religion Revisited: *Land's End* by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson New York: Tor, 1988, \$19.95 hc; 370 pp. *Pennterra* by Judith Moffett New York: Worldwide, 1988; \$3.95 pb, 320 pp. hardcover edition, Congdon & Weed, 1987 reviewed by Martha A. Bartter



Most science fiction fans agree (somewhat sadly) that there's nothing new under the SP sun, nothing left but the clever retelling of old tales—while expecting (always) something new and strange to emerge from the SF melting pot. Sometimes it does. More often it doesn't; and most of the time it really doesn't matter. When it does matter it can be very good—or very, very sad. This seems especially true when SF takes on the problem of religion, particularly the End of the World. C. S. Lewis played with the problem of the Earth's future in his *Out of the Silent Planet* trilogy, in which he assigned each planet its own genius, or "Eldil." Earth had the misfortune to have been assigned a "bent" one, an Eldil who allowed its planet to develop all kinds of misfortunes, including scientific irresponsibility. Humanity is saved only by the fortuitous (and irresponsible) kidnapping of a truly good and humble human by a "bent" scientist intent on making a clandestine visit to Mars. In Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End*, however, there is no salvation for humanity—only transcendence. The Earth comes to an end, but not irrationally or by chance; it is brought to its natural end as humans naturally outgrow it.

Each of these books has become the springboard for other SF works, but this time we have books which deliberately replay them, with varying success. Relative newcomer Judith Moffett takes big risks in *Pennterra*, a book loosely based on (and neatly referring to) *Out of the Silent Planet*, and makes it work. In *Prod Pohl* and Jack Williamson's *Land's End*, the authors tip their hat to Clarke's *Childhood's End*, but the book seems written only for the juvenile audience which hasn't met the original and might not be able to read the book if it did.

*Land's End* does have a fine opening sentence: "When her giant squid tried to eat the Ambassador from Pan-Mack, Graciela Navarro had never heard of the Eternal," but that's about as good as it gets. Careful Reader has, of course, noticed the italicized epigraph announcing that things live eternally "in the mind of the great Eternal," but may become very weary of being reminded regularly that the Eternal is still hovering off-stage. C. R. may even demand that the Eternal get itself explained at some point. I give away no plot points when I remark that it doesn't, and that by the time that C. R. realizes that it won't, C. R. may no longer care. The book is almost unbearably cute, with its sugar-sweet heroine (whose ethnic background is mere window-dressing) training a giant squid for a living while looking up, up, up at her handsome submarine commander Ron Tregarth. He's away from home too much to marry, but otherwise, life is just too, too perfect—except for the Eternal, of course, about which they don't yet know.

Although Pohl is a savvy political novelist, one would never know

it from *Land's End*, in which Earth is run by Pan-Mack, a totalitarian international corporation that has not only transcended but eliminated national governments, while leaving a few humans "free" in undersea cities. Since McKen family who control who control Pan-Mack are all portrayed as terminally greedy and stupid, we never find out how they managed to control the world; perhaps Pohl and Williamson simply wanted to create a situation where getting rid of absolutely everyone would be a relief. Nor is this the only anomaly. In passages written for a grade-school field trip, we are introduced to innovations like a 270-degree helmet on diving suits while important questions (matters of economics, politics, physics and engineering, for instance) are sublimely ignored.

A thoroughly nasty representative of Pan-Mack is touring Graciela's undersea City Atlantica as the story opens. He naturally blames Graciela when her squid attacks him, so naturally (?) Graciela is assigned to conduct him on a sightseeing tour. (One sin Clarke did not commit in *Childhood's End*, as he often did in later books, was to provide Cook's Tours. Pohl and Williamson throw in several.) This tour has a number of consequences, none of which markedly affect the plot (such as it is), which concerns the End of the World.

*Land's End* destroys the world with a comet (one of the more popular methods lately), throwing in a new twist: a belated attempt to blow up the comet destroys the ozone layer, resulting in Ozone Summer—a nice reversal on Nuclear Winter. We later learn, in a casual aside, that the comet would have been detected much sooner, and perhaps even destroyed far enough from Earth that its fragments might not have hit the Earth, had not the appropriate telescopes been removed at the whim of one of the ruling McKens. Having met several of the McKens of Pan-Mack, C. R. may anticipate an effective Armageddon, with a McKen-less Millennium to follow. But that reckons without the Eternal. In the end, we have no plot, no resolution, and no interest in whatever future may await the (few) human survivors.

The parallels with *Childhood's End* are telling—and sad. Clarke's novel shows the apparently inevitable bursting of humanity from its image stage into something unbearably greater. The pathos of the Guardians, who can never achieve this transformation, and of the human parents who must watch as their children become something that they can neither become nor understand, makes us into sympathetic readers. The ending is sufficiently ambiguous to satisfy both those who seek transcendence and those who deny it. Not so in *Land's End*. Here the end of the world is manipulated by the Eternal. When it seems that human heroism might (just possibly) allow some to survive



both Ozone Summer and the self-serving machinations of the McKens, the Eternal takes over. As a *deus ex machina*, it controls the story as unambiguously, as coldly, and as unbelievably as did the McKens. Did it plan, or simply predict, the comet? Pohl and Williamson don't even raise the question, much less answer it.

This seems particularly sad because *Land's End* addresses important issues—the state of the oceans; the danger of ecological destruction, particularly of the ozone layer; the threat of multinational corporate power; the future of the human race—and vitalizes them, portraying humans as puppets both before and after the Eternal takes over. Worse yet, they aren't even attractive puppets. Ron and Graciela never achieve the substance even of corrupted cardboard; the rest of the characters are more stereotypical and most are substantially less human. If the book leaves the reader with any questions (and it takes some care to raise as few as possible and to satisfy none whatever), they must be as to why the Eternal bothered collecting Earth at all, or why Pohl and Williamson bothered to write about it.

The situation is very different in *Pennterra*, in which a segment of humanity has fled an (apparently) terminally polluted Terra. (One weakness of the book is its failure to be more specific about this problem; given the topic, just a tad of soap-boxy could have been useful.) *Pennterra* itself, a habitable planet named by the Quaker exploration group, has turned out to have sentient inhabitants who communicate at least in part through empathy. Despite their unusual appearance, the "hrossa" (a reference to Lewis's various "hnav") have become real friends with some of the humans, including Danny, the young son of George Quinlan, one of the group's leaders. But this leadership is more apparent than real; the Quakers operate on consensus, and George is simply the one chosen to deal with the newly arrived settlers from Earth, who do not understand either the Quaker way of doing things or the rules laid down by the hrossa: that the humans must stay in the valley where they landed, reproduce only to replace themselves, and use no heavy machinery. This has limited them to subsistence farming, though they arrived equipped with advanced technology. Effectively, this anti-machine edict also prevents their leaving the planet. The new arrivals can understand none of this, move out of the valley, and plan their own settlement to suit their Terran lifestyle. At this point, the few pointed descriptions of the Earth now being abandoned by humanity could usefully be extended and explained, but Moffett, like Lewis, refrains from overt sermonizing, perhaps just a bit too carefully.

The contrast between Quaker and Sixer attitudes and lifestyles tells its own story. Unsure of the long-range wisdom of their choice, the Quakers still adhere to the traditional reverence for life that led them to agree to the hrossa demands in the first place. Gradually their unconscious wisdom becomes clear as the unbroken chain of life on

*Pennterra* is disclosed. That exactly such a chain of life is constantly threatened on Terra remains a subtext of the book. As the hrossa note sadly, the humans come from a world whose essential genius (Moffett does not call it an Eldid) has abdicated. This is not true of *Pennterra*, whose genius is perfectly (and compassionately) capable of taking care of itself, imposing natural penalties on those who refuse to follow its rules. As the youngsters who grow into the protagonists of *Pennterra* explore the planet and their own capabilities, we begin to understand the transactional aspects of living in new—and not entirely metaphorical—ways. The humans change the planet, but not as much as the planet changes the humans.

What Moffett has the good sense to allow C. R. to realize for him/herself is that Earth's genius also has imposed natural penalties for misbehavior. These penalties may have been inadequate to protect the biosphere, but they were fully effective in removing the ongoing human threat. Why else would Quakers and Sixers have to remove to *Pennterra*? As an ecological sermon, *Pennterra* is of course playing with loaded dice: the Quakers are proven right both morally and practically, not only because their consensus ethic works for them but also because the planetary genius backs their play. This does not destroy the tacit argument for peaceful, cooperative problem-solving. Moffett comes through as an appropriate heir to the deeply religious Lewis, both in her beliefs and in her storytelling ability, and outdoes him when it comes to science. Unlike Lewis, Moffett has the ability to make scientific investigation seem deeply fascinating and inevitably real. Moreover, she creates real characters about whom we learn to care: even the strange, ungainly hrossa, even the stubborn Sixers, determined to carry out their mission no matter what the odds.

The ethical problem in *Land's End* comes from the Eternal's casual collection of humanity. If this collection is intended to restate the concept of the uncaring universe (as does Godwin's "The Cold Equations"), the story fails, since the Eternal is depicted as purposive and sentient. If the Eternal is intended to represent God, it also fails through the essential triviality of the Eternal's apparent purpose. In contrast, the ethical situation in *Pennterra* depicts the conflicting value systems of two human groups, each trying to do its job as well as possible while conforming to its own code. That no compromise is possible with the survival of the planet—a situation we on Earth are just beginning to realize—is made clear, tactically and metaphorically. Ethics are applied in the only manner that makes sense, in human action that makes a difference. Effective human action is what SF is really about; and that is precisely what's missing in *Land's End*. Despite the intervention of the planetary genius, effective human (and humane) action is the core of *Pennterra*. It's not only a good moral, it's good science fiction. ▶

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## Michael Swanwick Three Short Fiction Reviews

The Lunatics\* by Kim Stanley Robinson (*Terry's Universe*, Tor Books) is a story that Jack London would have felt comfortable with, an exercise in political myth-making straight from the heart of the American populist Left. The basic plot is as simple as can be. A small group of prisoners, all memories of their past crimes, if any, burned away, is exploited as slave labor deep within the caverns of Luna. Against impossible odds, they escape their guards and attempt to tunnel their way to the surface. We are in the realm of the archetypal here and Robinson wisely drives everything to that purpose.

As suits a vengeance fantasy, which this surely is, the miner's names are derived from the Old Testament. Thus we have Jakob, Hester, Naomi, Solly, Freeman, Elijah—all calculated to evoke the slavery and liberation of the Israelites—and Oliver. Of whom more later. As suits a fantasy of the proletariat there is no one hero (though more as Eisenstein did in *Potemkin* Robinson gets around the attendant narrative problems by focusing much of the story on a leader who does not live to see the triumph of his plans) and Oliver, the viewpoint character, is the least clearly defined of the lot. He is the common man

of uncommon clay, no better than anyone else yet good enough for the job at hand.

Where the story gets strange is in its science. On the first page Jakob, the group's charismatic leader, explains their newfound ability to see in total darkness. The third eye, it seems, is a natural sense which takes all data from the rest of the senses, and processes them into a visual image transmitted by the third optic nerve, which runs from the forehead to the sight centers at the back of the brain. Then there's the blue, the claylike ore all human civilization relies on, which the miners are condemned to dig for:

It's an element. . . . A strange kind of element, nothing else like it. Promethium. Number 61 on the periodic table. . . . Promethium atoms release energy in the form of positrons, flying free when neutrons are hit by electrons. But during that impact more neutrons appear in the nucleus. Seems they're coming from nowhere. Some people say they're little white holes, every single atom of them. Burning forever at nine

hundred and forty curies per gram. So each atom of the blue is a power loop in itself, giving off energy perpetually. Bringing energy into our universe from somewhere else. Little gateways.

There's more, all very carefully worked out and demonstrably untrue. Promethium is indeed number 61 on the periodic table, a lanthanide and an odd bird in its own right, but it is also a beta emitter with a half-life of 2.5 years found only as a disintegration product of Neodymium-146 and the only rare earth that has never been found in nature. To say nothing of the "little white holes."

In a later elaboration which even in context may or may not be so, we learn that, "Promethium is the moon's living substance.... We walk in the nerves of the moon, tearing them out under the lash of the foremen. The shafts are a map of where the neurons used to be. As they drag the moon's mind out by its roots and take it back to Earth and use it for their own enrichment, the lunar consciousness fills us, we become its mind ourselves, to save it from extinction."

We are wandering within a poetic system, one both allusive and elusive, which I shall not attempt to decode here. But in a universe where matter replenishes itself with energy that flows like grace from Elsewhere, the lunacy of this doomed quest is its own reward and justification.

We all know the basic messages of this particular shape of story. The remarkable thing is that they are mentioned nowhere in the text but demonstrated everywhere. No one speaks of dignity, human worth or community. But we feel their presence in Robinson's clean descriptions of labor in claustrophobic darkness, of suffering, of shared joy. Here he is on the survivors' view from the surface: "Whatever happened, it was impossible in that moment to care. For above them a milky spill of stars lay thrown across the infinite black sky, lighting a million better worlds; while just over their heads the Earth glowed like a fine blue lamp; and under their feet rolled the white hills of the happy moon, holed like a great cheese."

In the wake of which, it is surely no coincidence that the name Oliver comes from the Latin for "olive." The olive tree is a hardy plant which can survive for a thousand years. Some contemporary specimens are believed to date from Roman times. Its wood was used to make the doors and posts of the Solomon's temple and the two cherubim within as well. In the Bible it serves as a symbol of fertility, beauty, divine blessing, peace and bounty, and is inextricably associated with Jesus through the Mount of Olives. But the pertinent scripture here, I believe, comes from Exodus, 27:20. It is part of God's instructions to Moses for the fitting of the ark of the covenant: "And thou shalt command the children of Israel that they bring the pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always."

"Life of Buddha" by Lucius Shepard (*Omnib*, May 1988) is a flawed story that nevertheless displays so many of this writer's characteristic strengths that it's hard to know where to begin. In keeping with the author's reputation for imaginatively recreated exotic settings, "Life" opens in an authoritatively depicted shooting gallery in the Third World of inner city Detroit. The cast of pimps, whores and junkies are presented sympathetically, not as cartoon figures of menace, but as real people caught in bad situations. The eponymous Buddha in particular is a fine creation, a fat, noddled-out junkie who long ago retreated into addiction as an escape from guilt and a sort of surrogate suicide. The lowest of the lowly, he yet engages our sympathy with his doomed quest to deny his last shreds of desire, emotion, involvement.

But in Shepard's universe, life cannot be denied. Buddha is drawn into the tangled affairs of Taboo, a would-be transsexual who has completed the hormone treatments but is afraid to go under the knife. It is Taboo's magical powers—inextricably linked with her sexual identity—which give Buddha one final chance for personal redemption. This complex mix of elements is stirred together with a sure hand.

My sole complaint with "Life of Buddha" lies in its ending, a long hallucinatory sequence which hammers home the message by giving his hero a reward commensurate with his deserts. This would've been twice the story had it been content with a moral victory and a death whose aftermath was no better revealed than that we must all one day face. But this flaw may not have been avoidable.

## Read This

Recently read and recommended by David Lunde:

*Mona Lisa Overdrive* by William Gibson (Bantam/Spectra, 1988). Continues to develop the world and characters Gibson has introduced so successfully in his previous work. Gibson combines fast-paced, intricate plotting, which develops a mystery in a hard-boiled, Chandleresque detective style, with a hard SF vision of a computer controlled society. The unstill center about which all of this rotates is the evolution of true artificial intelligence. What makes Gibson's work most impressive is his ability to convey the full grit and grime and stench of his future world through apparently casual details tossed off in passing.

A book with interesting similarities is George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Falls* (Arbor House, 1987). This is a fine book by any standards, and like Gibson's it makes use of the detective story conventions (this time the hero is an actual private eye) in a future world that has much the same atmosphere and the same cybernetically influenced society. Effinger's interests are different, though, directed more towards human concerns, and for that reason his characters and their problems have more powerful emotional impact.

Science fiction's premier stylist, Jack Vance, is back writing SF again after his Lyonesse series of fantasy novels. *Araminta Station* (TOR, 1988), the first volume of *The Cadwal Chronicles*, displays Vance's skill at creating complex plots, believably unusual worlds and societies, engaging characters, and sparklingly witty dialogue to the fullest. Again, a detective story asserts its influence as Glawen Clattur, a rookie policeman, seeks to solve a series of interlocking mysteries and establish his own place in the rigid social structure of Araminta Station on the planet Cadwal. The book is 554 pages long and left this reader eager for more at its end.

*Eternity* by Greg Bear (Warner Books, 1988). The sequel to Bear's *Eon*, this continues the genuinely cosmic story and concepts begun in that novel forty years later. Bear wraps up both the science and the lives of his main characters in a very satisfying manner. However, much of this book will elude the reader who has not read *Eon*, so start there if you have not yet read it.

Before I can explain, I must first mention another of Shepard's virtues. The man can, when he chooses, write like a sonofabitch. Take for example this description of an old junkie having trouble finding a vein: "Pete was lying in bed, on sheets so dirty they appeared to have a design of dark clouds. . . . On the night table a lamp with a ruffled shade cast a buttery yellow light, giving shadows to the strips of linoleum peeling up from the floor. Marlene came out of the bathroom, wearing an emerald-green robe. When she leaned over Pete, the halves of the robe fell apart, and her breasts hung free, catching a shine from the lamp. The needle in her hand showed a sparkle on its tip. She swabbed Pete's neck with a clump of cotton and held the needle poised an inch or two away."

This is lovely. As Shepard immediately points out "Taken all together, these things had the same richness and artful composition, the same important stillness, as an old painting that Buddha had once seen in the Museum of Art. He liked the idea that such beauty could exist in this ruinous house, that the sad souls therein could become even this much of a unity."

Here we have a demonstration not just of Shepard's skill—the iteration of beauty is so artfully done it's easy to miss the fact that it's a statement of something we've just been shown—but of the compulsive quality of his prose. There is an obsessive determination to be understood at work here, which imparts a very personal feel to his work.

Beauty matters to Shepard. It is not incidental that beauty can arise spontaneously within the lowest reaches of darkness and moral decay. Similarly, the disposition of his hero matters, and the conclusions that are to be drawn from this. He writes of things about which he clearly cares.

So this flaw—if you agree, as not all will, that flaw it is—arises from the heart of Shepard's strengths. I suspect he would no more lop the ending from his tale to produce a gracefully ambiguous fictive artifact than he would amputate his thumb in hopes of producing a slimmer, more shapely hand. And the readers respond to this commitment with a special warmth. I have never yet heard any of the man's admirers refer to him as Shepard.

It's Lucius, always Lucius.

"Stable Strategies for Middle Management," by Eileen Gunn (*Asimov's*, June 1988) is a gem of a story, both chilling and laugh-out-loud funny at the same time. Here's how it begins: "I awoke this morning to discover that bioengineering had made demands upon me during the night. My tongue had turned into a stiletto, and my left hand now contained a small chitinous comb, as if for cleaning a compound eye. Since I didn't have compound eyes, I thought that perhaps this presaged some change to come."

Margaret, the narrator, has problems. The bioengineering which is supposed in some undefined way to further her career does not appear to be working to her benefit. Meanwhile, her more easygoing husband Greg is turning into a butterfly.

At this early point, we seem to have a humorous piece, an inversion of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" with a touch of feminist-inspired social role reversal. But Gunn's humor is pointed straight at the corporate universe, a target she clearly knows well. As shown when Margaret takes a meeting with her closest rival: "I didn't think much of his marketing plan. The advertising section was a textbook application of theory with no practical basis. I had two options: I could force him to accept a solution that would work or I could yes him to death, making sure everybody understood it was his idea. I knew which path I'd take."

This is as succinct an evocation of office politics and moral ambiguities as one could hope for. It is here that Gunn shifts from the humorous to the satiric. Her heroine, guilty of a breach of office etiquette brought on by the unaccounted changes in her body chemistry, is called on the carpet by her boss:

He sat there, hunched over in a relaxed sway, like a mountain gorilla, unthreatened by natural enemies. "I just talked to Harry Winthrop, and he said you were trying to suck his blood during a meeting on marketing strategy." He paused for a

moment to check my reaction, but the neutral expression was fixed on my face and I said nothing. His face changed to project disappointment. "You know, when we noticed you were developing three distinct body segments, we had great hopes for you. But your actions just don't reflect the social and organizational development we expected."

What an ear for jargon Gunn has! Anyone who's ever worked in an office setting has heard that exact same lecture; only the details differ. But the humor here rises not so much from the artificiality of speech as from a lucid understanding of corporate thinking. Mutation is the latest promotion-path strategy, much as "computer literacy" was not so long ago, and yet while the organization actively promotes its use by middle management, any undesirable side-effects are entirely the employee's responsibility.

The analytic flensing continues at a lunch with her husband and their friend David. David is a stranger creature than anything we've seen so far, the corporate denizen who takes none of it seriously. He doesn't wear the uniform, avoids promotion, and cheerily refuses to give up his human form. "Bioengineering is a waste of time and money and millions of years of evolution," he says. "If human beings were intended to be managers, we'd have evolved pin-striped body covering." Speaking as someone who has Been There and occasionally drops by for a visit, I find the half-insectoid Margaret a lot easier to believe in than David with his happy-go-lucky immunity to herd mores.

But the point has been made. The corporate life is an unnatural one, which warps its inhabitants as bizarrely as any amount of bioengineering. Massive devolution is the least of it. Margaret is so thoroughly a creature of her environment that she can understand nothing but competition. Challenged to drop shop-talk in favor of something that's fun, she replies, "Something that's fun. I've invested all my time and most of my genetic material in this job. This is all the goddamn fun there is."

Well, there is a lot of fun here. More than that, though, there's the belly-laugh of recognition. Laid out for us in "Stable Strategies" is as clear-eyed and, yes, realistic an analysis of the modern workplace as anything you'll find in *Fortune* or *The Wall Street Journal*. My wife, who recently made the break into middle management herself, loves this story. She swears it contains the definitive statement of why she wanted to be middle management in the first place, and what she hopes to accomplish with her position now that she has it.

Ought I be worried?

Next Time: Two or Three Kind of Obscure Writers With Pretty Good Stories. ▶

## Robert L. Brown The Wreck of the World

Since the invention of the first labor saving device, humanity has embarked on a journey down a mechanized road. Many people have tried to predict the outcome of the path we've taken, with characteristically conflicting opinions. The relationship between people and machines has always been an uneasy one in the minds of many. Are machines a boon to humanity? Are they labor-saving devices which leave people free to contemplate higher things? Or will they replace mankind and render him useless and extraneous, as many believed in the early days of the machine age? Will machines make life too easy for humanity to a point where universal ennui and a feeling of futility set in, as postulated by S. Fowler Wright in *The Adventure of Wyndham Smith*? As automation and industrial robots continue to replace manual workers in today's automobile assembly plants and other factories, these questions regarding the relationship between humanity and machines have never been more relevant.

Numerous speculations regarding the relationship of humanity and the machine have been made down the years, since the advent of the industrial age. Perhaps the first fictionalized warnings about the possi-

bility of machines replacing humanity were *A Mexican Mystery* and *Wreck of a World*.

*A Mexican Mystery* is the first known example, if fiction, of a self-perpetuating machine with a mind of its own. This idea is developed in *Wreck of a World* when the machines can not only think but reproduce and then decide to take over the Earth. In order to accomplish this, they must first rid the world of their competition, mankind. This task they seem to achieve with remarkable ease. Thus the two books become the prelude and the actuality of the first novelized example of the ultimate warnings to industrialized mankind about the dangers of technology and the machine age. It preys on all of man's fears of being supplanted by machines as the dominant life form on Earth. It is the first known example of an often repeated theme in science fiction, long before the computer and the modern technological horror of "Colossus" and H.A.L. In the words of the author: "It was no mortal foe, but the dreaded host of machines... come out in their thousands against the race of man."

*A Mexican Mystery* owes its plot origin directly to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It is told through the eyes of an English engineer hired to

oversee the buildings of a railway through Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains, assisted by the well-intentioned inventor Pedro de Luz. The inventor's obsession with developing a locomotive which can fuel and water its own boiler without the aid of an engineer and his subsequent success prove the major plot elements. His locomotive follows Shelley's well worn path without the element of sympathy for the creation and his very success proves to be his undoing. Perhaps most interesting of all is that the self-perpetuating locomotive, after causing great havoc, is not destroyed in the end, despite the best efforts of everyone concerned.

In *Wreck of a World*, the concept of a self-perpetuating machine is carried out to its final, logical end. One gets the feeling when reading the two books together that *Wreck* was probably a rush job to capitalize on the success of *A Mexican Mystery*, as the book reads as if it were written in haste. However, fast-paced writing and a compelling idea carry the book.

Both books were published in 1889 in England, enjoyed brief popularity and then faded into obscurity. There were at least ten known printings of each book although only a handful can be accounted for today in their original state. Even Beller in both his original checklist and the revised edition failed to include *Wreck of a World*, although it is mentioned in passing by I. P. Clarke in *The Pattern of Expectation, 1644-2001*, and *The Reginald Index to Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*.

Of the author, W. Grove, there is virtually nothing known, even if Grove was his real name. Grove must have gotten a good chuckle or two from the way the book was marketed and sold. In *A Mexican Mystery* the author uses the locomotive as an instrument of destruction.

*Wreck of a World* also utilizes locomotives as the principal agents of the machine world's war against mankind. However, one of the major distribution points of the book was railway station book-stalls. One can well imagine the discomfort of the reader who picked up either book and read it, as many undoubtedly did, while on a train trip. The idea of rolling across the countryside being pulled by a locomotive which turns on humanity and literally stomps it flat must have made for an uneasy journey for more than one impressionable traveler. Both books are far closer to what is now known as novella length, rather than full novel length, which indicates that the books were probably written with the rail traveler in mind as most rail trips in England are relatively short.

Although their origin is British, both books are set in North America. The use of America and Mexico as settings for books which could have easily taken place in England was a common device utilized in British fiction right up through the 1930s. It mirrored an underlying British attitude that anything was possible in the New World. However, it is interesting to note that Americans were generally portrayed in the fiction of the day as more admirable people than in *Wreck of a World*. It is this portrayal that undoubtedly helped to keep the two books from being published in the United States until now.

The situation in the world of 1948 as envisioned in *Wreck of a World* does have certain points of interest. In this world automation is virtually universal. Alternate energy sources are being utilized, including the harnessing of the tides and waterfalls to generate power. However, the author also notes that there has been a general decline to decadence in religion and morality. This coupled with the fact that the hero is also a minister would seem to indicate that Grove himself might very well have been a minister, since it was very common in Victorian and Edwardian times to find many authors who were professionals such as doctors or churchmen. These people were the most literate class of their day.

*Wreck of a World* is also a disaster novel of what is apparently a global catastrophe. Although events in other countries are not specifically detailed, the author gives every indication from the years without contact with anyone else at their last retreat that the magnitude of the disaster is total. And like a disaster novel it has the time-honored elements which occur in many novels of this highly populated genre of science fiction: the situation, the calamity, the escape or trek through the ruined and depopulated countryside, and finally the founding of a new society or colony.

Although both books are warning novels as to the perils of technology and mechanization, the scientists and engineers who created the machines never envisioned their ability to think for themselves. As I. P.

## The C. S. Lewis Hoax by Kathryn Lindskoog

Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988; hc,  
no price listed; 175 pp.  
reviewed by David G. Hartwell & Kathryn Cramer

Received in the mail for review, this work of Christian scholarship asserts, among other things, that C. S. Lewis did not write *The Dark Tower*, and casts (possibly actionable) doubt upon Walter Hooper's role as discoverer and preserver of unpublished material and upon the authenticity of the posthumously published Lewis works. The first line of the Foreword by John R. Christopher reads: "Although this book is written in an entertaining way for a broad spectrum of readers, it springs from serious scholarship." Actually, a quick reading leaves one with the impression of a crusading author who feels she has discovered a huge and malign plot. This is not the ordinary serious scholarly tone for the presentation of a theory that is quite unsettling and more than somewhat convincing. Equal parts real news and inflammation, this book is not the New York Times of scholarship, but rather suggests a paranoid religious theory worthy of Philip K. Dick.

Clarke points out in *The Pattern of Expectation, 1644-2001*, the ability to think and survive is evolutionary rather than intentional. Nor does Grove stridently indict science and technology in an outright manner. The designers and builders react with shocked disbelief at the first indications that the machines have become much more than their creators intended. The engineers never do come to terms with the problem. When the irrefutable fact of the machines' ability to reproduce confronts them, the engineers simply wander off in stunned disbelief.

Grove's manner of dispatching humanity was certainly new at the time it was written. By 1889, the traditional disasters to the human race, such as war, plague, the Second Coming, flood, and impact with another celestial body were already well-worn devices. An end to modern society by technology other than war had only been hinted at by Jeffries in *After London*, or *Wild England*, and it was still ten years until the first "mad scientist" would destroy Earth in Fred T. Jane's *The Violet Flame*. Certainly machines both existed and were envisioned that would destroy people; however, these machines were doing so in a context of war at the bidding of other people. Nobody had come up with the idea before that machines might take it upon themselves to dispatch humanity. It was still over thirty years until Karel Capek would write *R.U.R.* in which robots would want to be "the masters." In 1952 a short play by Roman Rolland entitled *The Revolt of the Machines* was published. This play was very much in the spirit of the Grove books, where all machines unite to get rid of humanity.

One unique point about the two Grove novels lies in the fact that the author makes no attempt to anthropomorphize the machines. There are many earlier examples of "robot" novels or stories, such as Hoffman's "Automata" in 1814, Melville's "The Bellower" in 1855, or "The Steam Man of the Plains" by Edward S. Ellis in 1876. These creations were humanoid machines who had some built in human characteristics. Grove's creations have no human characteristics other than an ability to function together in concert to accomplish a single purpose, to obliterate the human race. The real horror lies in the fact that enemies are normal machines such as locomotives and steamships which we are familiar with and are used to having serve our needs.

The two novels' major accomplishment is that they succeed in creating that which has been, and is still, today, one of the principal goals of science fiction, to create a true sense of "alienness." Although the machines are commonplace devices, from a goal and operation standpoint they might have come from another planet. Indeed, there is a striking similarity in attitude and purpose between the self-perpetuating locomotives and steamships in *Wreck of the World* and those "Intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic" brilliantly described by H.

G. Wells in *War of the Worlds*. As with the Martians in the Wells book, there is no basis or desire for communication. Humanity and the machines are in total conflict, man wishing to have the machines serve his will and the machines wishing to dispose of mankind, permanently.

Grove's books, especially *Wreck of a World*, also evoke a feeling very reminiscent of 19th Century paintings of American townships, particularly those of the Midwest. Even though they are set in the future, there is no sense of crowding or a large number of people. A feeling of emptiness is evoked throughout the book, even before the machines begin their campaign of annihilation in earnest. Even the last refuge of humanity, the Sandwich Islands, better known today as Hawaii, are described as being depopulated.

Let us turn to a vision from a simpler age, written in a time when technology was new and a little frightening, rather than today when technology is familiar but often considerably more than a little frightening. In this earlier time the organic world is fighting for its life against its own organic creations. It was a world when anything was possible and modern technology was just coming into existence with its full potential still before it. Let us listen to the obscure voice from the past, warning us of the dangerous path we are treading, down the trail of dependence on machinery and technology. A voice was warning us even then, that machines might someday become too independent. ▶

Robert L. Brown is a book dealer in Seattle, Washington

## THE TRANSYLVANIAN READING LIST: The 13 Most Important Vampire Novels Compiled by Greg Cox

Alert readers of the NYRSP may have noted that almost every issue of this magazine has featured a review of some new vampire novel. This odd phenomenon may be connected to the fact that this staff member has spent the last five years (including a lengthy term of employment at the Seattle Plasma Collection Center) writing and researching a book called *The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction*, forthcoming from Borgo Press. Considering that, given the nature of obsession, these undead reviews will likely continue into the immediate future, the following list should help place the current crop of fictional *vampires* into historical perspective . . .

*Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, 1897. Not the first but rather the culmination of the Victorian vampire tradition, and the book that defined the genre for the next century.

*I Am Legend*, by Richard Matheson, 1954. Amazingly, the first outstanding vampire novel since *Dracula*, sixty-seven years before. An ingenious mixture of vampires, science fiction, and end of the world scenarios.

*Doctors Wear Scarlet*, by Simon Raven, 1960. Vampirism as a psychological perversion, with the emphasis on characterization rather than gore. Hard to find, but worth it.

*Some of Your Blood*, by Theodore Sturgeon, 1961. Another human vampire, as in *Doctors Wear Scarlet*, but focussing, with unprecedented candor, on the sexual aspects.

*Progeny of the Adder*, by Leslie Whitton, 1965. A policeman hunts a killer who may or may not be a vampire. A remarkably gritty and realistic vampire novel, disguised as a police procedural.

*Salem's Lot*, by Stephen King, 1975. The traditional, *Dracula*-style vampire moves into the Twentieth Century—and a neighborhood just

like yours. Possibly the most imitated vampire novel of the modern era.

*The Dracula Tape*, by Fred Saberhagen 1975. A witty rebuttal to Bram Stoker, as told by the Count himself. Very funny, and indicative of an increased sympathy for the vampire's point of view.

*Interview With The Vampire*, by Anne Rice, 1976. A more serious first-person account of vampirism. Moody, sensual, and darkly beautiful.

*Hotel Transylvania*, by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, 1977. More historical romance than horror, but notable for its unabashedly heroic vampire, Saint-Germain. The start of an ongoing, extremely popular series.

*Tabitha Tiffen*, by John Linssen, 1978. A thoroughly modern young woman has an affair with an attractive undead, only to run afoul of his, er, eccentric relatives. The vampire novel as romantic comedy: something rarely attempted and never so well.

*The Black Castle*, by Les Daniels, 1978. The first and best of a series of very black, genuinely scary historical vampire novels. Sort of like Chelsea Quinn Yarbro with sharper teeth.

*The Vampire Tapestry*, by Suzy McKee Chamas, 1980. The best science fictional vampire novel since *I Am Legend*, which rigorously explores the psychology of a humanoid predator.

*The Hunger*, by Whitley Strieber, 1981. A slick, sexy bestseller that takes basically the same idea as *The Vampire Tapestry* (the vampire as alien species) and wrings it for cheap thrills and excitement, as well as a memorable character in the person of an undying, unhappy seductress.

*Feare Dream*, by George R.R. Martin, 1982. An epic-sized historical saga, set before and after the Civil War, featuring good vampires, bad vampires, and a science fictional explanation that covers them both. Engrossing fun on a large scale. ▶

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# Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

\* indicates entry not seen

## GREGORY BENFORD b. 1941

ACROSS THE SEA OF SUNS. New York: Timescape Books Distributed by Simon and Schuster, [1984].  
Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing has code 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 on copyright page.

\* ALSO: New York: Bantam Books, [July 1987]. Wrappers. Bantam Spectra 0-553-26664-0 (\$3.95). Revised text. Last chapter of 1984 Timescape edition rewritten and new final chapter added to link novel to GREAT SKY RIVER.

AGAINST INFINITY. New York: Timescape Books Distributed by Simon and Schuster, [1983].  
Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing has code 1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2 on copyright page.

ARTIFACT. [New York: Tor A Tom Doherty Associates Books, [1985].  
Boards. First printing: June 1985 on copyright page.

AT THE DOUBLE SOLSTICE. [New Castle, VA: Cheap Street, December 1988.] Approximately 150 copies printed. Three issues, first two simultaneous, last later. (A) Unprinted wrappers. Signed by Benford. (B) Wrappers. Unsigned issue (not seen). (C) Three-quarter niger goat and handmade paper. Signed by Benford (not seen).

DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS. New York: Ace Publishing Corporation, [1970] Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. Ace Book 14215 (60s).

FIND THE CHANGELING. [New York: A Dell Book, [1980].  
Wrappers. First printing—November 1980 on copyright page. Dell 12604 (\$2.50). With GORDON EKLUND.

GREAT SKY RIVER. Toronto New York London Sydney Auckland: Bantam Books, [1987].  
Boards with cloth shelf back. A Bantam Spectra Book/ December 1987/PG 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

HEART OF THE COMET. Toronto New York London Sydney Auckland: Bantam Books, [1986].  
Boards with cloth shelf back. A Bantam Spectra Book/March 1986/. . . /MV 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page. With DAVID BRIN.

IF THE STARS ARE GODS. New York: Published by Bantam Publishing Corporation, [1977].  
No statement of printing on copyright page. With GORDON EKLUND.

IN ALIEN FLESH. [New York: Tor A Tom Doherty Associates Book, [1986].  
Boards. First printing: March 1986/. . . /D 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

IN THE OCEAN OF NIGHT. New York: The Dial Press/James Wade, [1977]. Boards. First printing so stated on copyright page.

JUPITER PROJECT. Nashville/New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, [1975].  
Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

\* ALSO: New York: Bantam, [October 1980]. Wrappers. Bantam 0-425-04569-2 (\$2.95). Revised text.

OF SPACE/TIME AND THE RIVER. [New Castle, Virginia: Cheap Street, [1985].  
177 copies printed. Two issues, no priority: (A) Brown cotton cloth with handmade Egyptian papyrus and printed paper title strip mounted on front cover. 47 numbered and 4 lettered copies signed by Benford and artist Judy King-Rienets. In cloth drop box (traycase). Note: This issue not published in dust jacket. The "Publisher's edition." (B) Blue Japanese cloth, printed paper spine label. 121 numbered and 5 lettered copies signed by Benford and King-Rienets. Issued with printed dust jacket in cloth slipcase. The "Collector's edition." No statement of printing on copyright page. Collected later in IN ALIEN FLESH.

SHIVA DESCENDING. [New York: Avon, [1980].  
Wrappers. First Avon Printing, March, 1980 on copyright page. Avon 75168 (\$2.50). With WILLIAM ROTSLER.

THE STARS IN SHROUD. New York: Published by Bantam Publishing Corporation, [1978].  
No statement of printing on copyright page. Note: A rewrite of DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS.

\* TIDES OF LIGHT. New York: Bantam Spectra, [February 1989].

TIME'S RUB. [New Castle, Virginia: Cheap Street, [1984].  
Approximately 150 copies printed. Three issues, first two simultaneous, last later. (A) Unprinted handmade Richard de Bas "patchwork" paper wrappers. Signed by Benford. 52 copies distributed to Cheap Street subscribers and friends of the publisher. (B) Printed Arches cream paper wrappers. Two variants: (1) 60 copies distributed to general customers of the press during calendar year 1984. (2) About 25 copies for Gregory Benford. These copies were imprinted "At the time of the dim sun, we send greetings." (C) Cloth with printed paper label on front cover. 7 copies signed by Benford (not seen). No statement of printing. Collected later in IN ALIEN FLESH.

TIMESCAPE. New York: Simon and Schuster, [1980].  
Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing has code 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 on copyright page.

ALSO: London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1980. Boards. No statement of printing on copyright page. Note: Has unauthorized editorial cuts.

### Edited Fiction:

Hitler Victorious: Eleven Stories of the German Victory in World War II. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988.

No statement of printing on copyright page. Edited, with preface and short story, "Vehlela," by Benford. With MARTIN HARRY GREENBERG.

Nuclear War. New York: Ace Books, [1988].  
Wrappers. Ace edition / July 1988/. . . /10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page. Ace 0-441-56640-6 (\$3.50). Edited, with introduction and short story "To the Storming Gulf," by Benford. With MARTIN HARRY GREENBERG.

Note: This is part of a series of bibliographic checklists of SF and fantasy writers that will update, revise, and expand the standard reference work Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors by L. W. Currey. For the organizational principles and methodology used in this and future lists, please refer to the introduction to that work. Knowledgeable persons are invited to communicate omissions and corrigenda directly to L. W. Currey, Elizabethtown, NY 12932.

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## The Wheel of Fortune

Well, first off, the bad news: Daniel M. Pinkwater has suffered the good fortune of having a mainstream publisher (Addison Wesley) purchase a collection of his NPR talks for a pleasantly high advance—which gives them control over serial publication. We will be negotiating with them for the right to publish more Pinkwater, but for the present, his material is restricted and we aren't able to give you any Pinkwater this issue. Except, of course, for a few chickens.

Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, meanwhile, have both been hired by Tor for full-time positions (Managing Editor and Administrative Editor, respectively). This is wonderful for them, but means that they have far less time and energy to devote to their traditionally time-consuming production duties on the magazine. As a result, Susan Palwick and Gordon Van Gelder are frantically learning PageMaker.

Patrick was offered the position of Tor following Debbie Notkin's decision to return to the Bay Area. Patrick has taken Debbie's vacant office; Susan Palwick has taken Debbie's vacant apartment, effecting a dramatic change of neighborhood from the Upper West Side to the Lower East Side, where Susan anticipates finding new leather accessories and material for an entirely new analytical essay on character development. (Once, that is, she gets all the boxes unpacked and manages to find both her bedroom slippers.)

Kathryn Cramer has left her position at the Virginia Kidd agency to establish herself in the Washington, D.C. area. She swears she won't miss any more meetings of the magazine than she has while living in Pennsylvania and will continue as Features Editor. Knowing Kathryn, we expect her to pull it off.

So that's the news: all of it good news for somebody, all of it requiring shifts, adaptations and continued determination in our quest to produce a monthly magazine. Following successful appearances at Philcon and Readercon, the editorial board is pleased to announce that the magazine is now nearly halfway to a subscription base that will meet our financial goal of breaking even within the first year ("we have a restless urge to break even"). In order to get the rest of the way to solvency, we urge you to show your copies to friends and to encourage them to subscribe. Those of you who met us at Philcon or Readercon know how persistent we are. We intend to keep at this end to develop the magazine as far as, as long as, and as much as our support will allow—even if our editors wind up on different continents, as seems entirely likely.

We are interested in trading advertising with conventions, clubs, and other magazines. If you're interested, let us know. We'll be out in force at Boskone and other conventions during the spring (Sarcon, in Louisville in February, is one we particularly support). Of course, you can always reach any of all of us at our Dragon Press address. When necessary, mail to our staff members will be forwarded . . .

—Susan Palwick, David G. Hartwell, and the editors

**Editorial Aside:** Terry Bisson refuses to confirm that he is Prof. Red Knuckles, author of a letter we printed in the last issue, but we believe he is. We intended to run a note to that effect accompanying the letter, since we don't publish pseudonymous material. But we forgot in the hard push to finish the issue.

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